

STAG CON

'81



STAG CON '81 : FICTION AND POETRY AWARDS

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Hello, and welcome to Stag Con '81.

In this zine we present the winning, runner-up and commended entries in the Fiction and Poetry sections of the Con competition.

This is something of an innovation, as until now the winners have been announced at the closing ceremony, and the entries have made their zine appearance at a later date.

However, we thought it might be nice for you to have the chance to see the stories during the Con, and to congratulate the winners on their well-deserved victories. This time the names of the winners will be announced at the opening ceremony, and the zine will be available after that.

We will still do our best not to spoil the surprise. At the moment only the judges know the titles of the winning entries, and no-one yet knows the names of the winners. Sylvia will open the envelopes and send the details to me in time for me to type the contents page for the zine. After that, only Janet and Sheila will know as the zine is printed and collated. The boxes of printed zines will not be opened until after the announcement of the winners.

I am sure that you will enjoy the zine, and that you will join me in congratulating the winners.

I hope that you all enjoy the Con, and I'm looking forward to the chance of meeting as many of you as possible. Do come up and say hello to the Committee- they don't bite!

March, 1981.

Valerie.

STOP THIEF

The figure stiffened, shrinking back against the wall in dismay. Someone was coming... Where to go? Must not be caught out in the open like this... Not dealing with incompetents, but with highly-trained men and women who would be instantly suspicious. The footsteps passed by the end of the passage way and went on. The figure let out a long breath. It was stupid to be so unnecessarily foolhardy as to move around in daytime; although there were always people awake and about there were fewer of them at night. Now the open space could be crossed, there was no-one coming... Swiftly as a scopolomander and into the safety of the cabin!

* * *

Ensign Foggarty gave an exclamation of disgust. "Pam, have you seen my crimson wrap?"

Her cabin-mate looked up from her delicate manoeuvre with her nail-polish brush. "No. Isn't it in your drawer?"

"I'd hardly ask you if it was," Foggart said crossly, pulling the contents of the drawer out in an untidy heap. "No, it isn't here. That's distinctly odd. I know it was there yesterday, because I put it on after I had a shower."

"Perhaps someone's borrowed it."

"Without asking?" It was one of those unwritten rules that was meticulously observed on board the Enterprise.

"No, I suppose not. Better look in all your drawers."

Foggarty heaved a patient sigh and resumed her search.

* * *

The late shift clattered into the rec room with their usual noisy abandon. Collecting trays from the dispensers they sorted themselves out into groups round the tables.

Kevin Riley looked at the abandoned plate on his table and frowned. "Who came in to eat early?"

"No-one did tonight," someone else said.

"Someone has." Riley pointed. He picked the plate up. "It's still warm."

"Well, whoever they are they'll be back, then, won't they; they can't have eaten more than two or three mouthfuls."

They sat down, not really curious. When they were finished the uneaten food was still waiting for its owner.

"It'll be cold now. Put it in the disposal chute."

Riley picked it up and eyed it closely. He grinned. "This is shabash. You don't think it's Commander Spock's, do you?"

"Not unless he's taken to midnight feasts. He went off watch as I came on. He'll be fast asleep by now. Plenty of people like shabash - I quite like it myself."

Riley wrinkled his nose in distaste and threw the food away.

* * *

"Another pillow?" The quartermaster eyed Chekov with twinkling suspicion. "How do you lose a pillow, Ensign?"

Chekov shrugged embarrassedly. "I don't know, sir. It just wasn't there last night."

The quartermaster grunted. "That's a pretty lame excuse, Mr. Chekov. I'm sure you'll learn to do better in time. I'll issue you with another one on one condition... that you remember an officer serving on a Starship, no matter how

junior he is, is too old to engage in pillowfights!" Chuckling at his own wit he reached into the cupboard and produced a pillow.

Chekov glared at his broad back indignantly. "I never engage in such childish behaviour. I told you, the other one just disappeared. I don't know where it is."

The older man grinned widely and dug a knowing elbow into Chekov's ribs. "Can't remember where you spent the night, eh? Now that's bad!"

Chekov grabbed the new pillow and fled while his dignity was still intact.

* * *

"I tell you there's a whole box of candy bars gone," Tonia Barrows insisted. "There were twelve boxes here last time I broke any out, now there are only eleven."

"You don't usually miscount," Appleyard agreed, "but who'd take a whole boxful of candy bars? There are a hundred in a box."

"Who steals around here anyway?" Tonia replied.

"Cilla Foggarty lost her red wrap the other day," Appleyard said absently, checking off the contents of the upper shelf. "She practically accused me of walking off with it."

"Accused you...? Pam, she didn't!"

"Well, not in so many words, but you could see what she was thinking." Appleyard came down the steps. "What's a box of candy bars? Log them as issued."

Tonia Barrows pulled a face. "I don't like telling fibs. I'll mention it. It's quite possible I did miscount last time."

* * *

"A box of candy bars? Really, this is getting too much," Tom Nellis complained. "Last week we lost two kilos of kroyberries just after we'd got them in specially for this dinner the Captain's giving when we get to the Vulcan Colony. How I'm going to tell him about it I don't know. He ordered them specifically."

Tonia Barrows frowned. "How do you mean, you lost them?"

"One day they were here, next day they weren't." Nellis spread his hands expressively. "Gone. Disappeared. None left."

Barrows frowned. "Did someone take them?"

"Well, they didn't walk away."

"No, I mean did someone steal them?"

"It looks like it, doesn't it?" Nellis said grimly. "Some light-fingered so-and-so who doesn't know what's his and what isn't."

"Hers," Barrows said slowly.

"Hers? Why do you think it's one of the women?"

"Men don't use frilly crimson wraps," Barrows said meaningly. "Cilla Foggarty's lost hers."

"A frilly crimson wrap, eh?" Nellis's eyes gleamed. "I'd like to see Foggarty in that!"

"Well, you won't get the chance now," Barrows said acidly.

* * *

Tomini Tamura emerged from her bathroom towelling her dripping hair vigorously. At last she dropped the towel on the end of her bunk and ~~dropped~~ on the shelf for her hairbrush. Not encountering it, she held up the tangled mass of black hair with one hand and peered at the place under the mirror where

it always lay. Neither brush nor comb was to be seen. Crossly she began to open drawers, lift ornaments in a vain search, but the missing objects were not to be found. Annoyed and puzzled, she sat down on the end of her bed with a flounce of anger and tried to think what she could have done with them. She couldn't recall having put them down anywhere else, but they clearly weren't where they should be. Eventually she shrugged her shoulders, wrapped the towel round her head, and went off to find someone to borrow from until she could get a new set from stores.

* * *

Spock's hand reached out to the precise spot on his bathroom shelf where his toothpaste lay. It was not there. Eyebrows flaring at its unexpected disappearance, he did not feel compelled to begin a search for it. If it was not in its usual place it had been removed by some outside agency, and not by his own forgetful hand. He turned his attention to the box which held the new toothbrush he had requested. It was empty. His brows drew together in a silent frown. The illogicality of Humans was something he had grown almost accustomed to, but there was no reason he could think of to account for the removal of a new toothbrush, when they were readily available from ship's stores; and even less could he think why anyone else on board should be attracted to a tube of his particular brand of toothpaste, a brand especially laid in for stores by a thoughtful yeoman on their recent stop-over on Vulcan.

He finished dressing, made a mental note to obtain replacements during the day, and walked out into his living area. It would be interesting to see if anything else was missing. Being a tidy, methodical and unacquisitive person his possessions were quickly checked. Nothing else had gone.

* * *

Christine Chapel opened the door of her shower and stepped in. Almost immediately she drew back in surprise. The floor was wet. She hadn't used the shower since yesterday; the floor shouldn't be wet. What was more, the water was still faintly warm. Now who would have the infernal cheek to creep in and use her shower? Faintly annoyed, she switched the shower on, let out a yelp of pained surprise, and as hurriedly switched it off again. She looked at the thermostat with unbelieving eyes. No-one had a shower that hot! Well, she could only think of one person, and he was the very last she would suspect of creeping in and using her bathroom without asking!

* * *

"Now this isnae funny!" Scott said indignantly. He closed the cupboard door with a snap.

"What's the matter?" McCoy asked in surprise. "Someone pinched that bottle of scotch you promised me a glass of?"

"Nay, the scotch is there all richt, but that teddy bear I bought on Starbase 12 a month back has gone."

"Teddy bear?" McCoy said in disbelieving tones. "Teddy bear? Scotty, I never knew you had a passion for teddy bears!"

Scott grinned. "Aye, and it hasnae got six-inch fangs either, ye ken. Don't be a fool, Leonard. I bought it for ma godson's new babe. I put it in yon cupboard where I keep my scotch, and it's gone."

"Are you sure you put it there?"

"Aye. Ye don't think I'd have a daft thing like that up on ma shelf in full view, do ye? There are too many folk around here wi' an odd sense of humour."

"Well, it didn't walk out of the cupboard by itself," McCoy said reasonably, "any more than that scotch will."

"Och, I'm sorry." Scott reached for the bottle and glasses. Pouring out a couple of generous slugs he added, "All the same, I dinna think I care for

the idea that someone's been walking into my quarters without a by-your-leave and helping themselves to my belongings."

"That's odd," McCoy reflected. "Christine was complaining the other day that someone had been in her quarters and used her shower without asking."

* * *

It had been a long day. Too long. And he still had not thought of a suitable reply to that move Spock had made last night. A good, relaxing shower was what he needed, slip into that new dressing-gown he'd acquired on Beta Aurigae. His lips curved into the faintest of smiles. Playing chess against Spock was always challenging; he'd learned very early on that it wasn't only a matter of playing as well as you could, there was also the matter of throwing the superb logician off the scent, confusing him as to one's intentions. Illogicality, Spock called it. Tactics was the term Kirk preferred, and was prepared to use not only tactics directly concerned with the game as a distraction.

His new robe was guaranteed to distract. Full length, warmly hooded, superbly coloured in shot pinks and reds and purples, the various poses it depicted shifted and altered as the wearer moved. Why Deannah had purchased it for him galaxy only knew, but there it hung in his cupboard and he might as well make use of it as a distraction. He could see the disapproving eyebrows rising already. Grinning in anticipation, Kirk sauntered out of his bathroom clad only in a towel and opened his wardrobe. The robe was not there.

* * *

Kirk leaned back in his chair, unsmiling. McCoy seemed faintly surprised.

"I thought you'd see the funny side of it, Jim," he said, grinning. "It isn't every day your Chief Engineer loses his teddy bear."

"It isn't only Scotty," Kirk said grimly. "From all the reports I've had recently, we have an outbreak of thieving."

McCoy was shocked. "People on Starships don't steal. They don't get to serve in space at all if anything like that shows up in their psychological profiles. You simply can't have thieves in confined communities, it's too potentially explosive. I should think it's someone's idea of a practical joke."

"Practical jokers are nearly as dangerous," Kirk said. "But there has been a spate of petty thieving throughout the ship, and it's got to be stopped."

McCoy looked distressed. "Are you sure, Jim? It's a serious accusation to make. It'll cost someone their career."

"They should have thought of that before they started," Kirk said.

"It may just be friends borrowing things..." McCoy began.

"Bones, how many friends do I have who borrow things without asking? Or Spock?"

"Both of you have lost things?"

"Yes, both of us. And things have gone from stores as well."

"Have you a list of things that've gone? I'd like to see it, it might be helpful." He read down it slowly, raising his eyebrows over one or two items and pulling a face over the last. "Vulcan toothpaste! Who'n hell'd want to steal Vulcan toothpaste?"

"Another Vulcan," Kirk suggested, grinning.

"If we had another Vulcan on board he'd be chief suspect," McCoy nodded. "Whoever it was 'borrowed' Christine's shower had the thermostat turned up far too high for a Human."

"Two kilos of kroyberries have gone too," Kirk said, suddenly sitting up straight.

"And Kevin Riley found that plate of shabash left on a rec room table one night," McCoy was also sitting up excitedly.

Kirk slumped again. "We don't have another Vulcan on board, and besides that, what would a Vulcan want with a teddy bear? Come to that..." he grinned a little self-consciously, "I doubt if many of them would care to be seen in an Aurigan pleasure-robe either!"

McCoy eyed him knowingly. "Is that what you lost, Jim?" He gave a chuckle of amusement. "I've only seen one once, but I can't picture a Vulcan in one, no. We'll have to be on the alert all the time, that's all." He didn't relish the idea at all.

"We already are," Kirk told him grimly. "I don't like thieves, and this one is going to find he's played his little game once too often."

* * *

"Who's there?" The shout rang loudly over the hum of the engines.

Chief Engineer Scott swung his head. "Who is it, Dailey?"

"I saw someone moving down there, sir," Dailey pointed. "Since this is a restricted area..."

"It could be the ship's not-so-funny joker," Scott finished grimly. "Aye, laddie. We'll split up. You go round that way, I'll go this. There's no other way out and we'll have him cornered."

Moving on stealthy feet they set off. Three minutes later they met face to face round the final corner. Dailey's face wore an expression of puzzled amazement.

"You can't have let him slip past you, Mr. Scott."

The Engineer eyed him grimly. "I most certainly did not, laddie. Are you sure you saw someone?"

"Positive," Dailey said firmly. "I didn't see whether it was male or female, just a flash of movement."

"Well then, where have they gone?" Scott demanded not unreasonably. "Unless we've been invaded by some alien that can walk through walls..."

He absorbed that idea slowly. Anyone who had encountered the myriad life forms seen by the crew of the Enterprise didn't dismiss such an idea lightly. He pressed the intercom.

* * *

Spock shook his head. "I have processed all the relevant data, Captain, and I can find no abnormal energy readings such as there must be if an alien with such a capability were to have boarded the ship."

Kirk let out an impatient breath. "Well how did whoever it was get away, then? Young Dailey's not the impressionable sort. If he says he saw someone the likelihood is that he did."

"Affirmative," Spock agreed.

"Then how did they get away?" Kirk demanded. "There's no way out at all. I've checked out the area with Scotty."

"I have no suggestion at this time, Captain. The only means of egress are the ventilation ducts, and it is hardly logical to suggest that any crew member is small enough to crawl into one of them."

"And you're sure you would be able to detect an energy reading if it was some being capable of molecular change?"

"Quite sure. All the creatures we have encountered that are capable of such an activity provide high energy level readings which peak during the moments of change when considerable energy is lost. There is no such creature

aboard the Enterprise."

* * *

McCoy yawned tiredly as he approached his cabin. "I'll be glad to get to bed," he said apologetically. "It's been a long day."

"The day has been of exactly the same duration as any other," Spock told him. "We maintain an arbitrary twenty-four hour day on board the Enterprise..."

"I don't need a lecture on time," McCoy interrupted in exasperation. "Really, Spock, sometimes your literal-mindedness..."

Spock suddenly grabbed at his arm, putting a finger to his own lips.

"Wha...?" McCoy began in surprise.

Spock pulled him back several paces and eyed him oddly. "Doctor, do you have a rendezvous arranged for tonight?"

"A rend..." McCoy broke off. "Who with and where? Spock, what are you on about?"

"With a woman, in your quarters, now," Spock said with precision.

McCoy gaped at him. "No, I certainly do not," he said crossly, "but even if I had it wouldn't be any concern of yours."

"I am not attempting to pry into your personal affairs, Doctor," Spock said with dignity. "I am merely attempting to establish whether or not you are expecting a visitor this evening."

"You mean there's someone in there now?" McCoy hissed excitedly.

Spock just managed not to sigh. "I thought I had already made that plain, Doctor."

"If you'd just said, 'Who is that waiting for you?'..." McCoy began heatedly.

"Vulcans do not ask such direct, personal questions," Spock said stiffly.

"I'll have their hide for a bedspread!" McCoy said intemperately. He opened his cabin door. The room was empty. He turned back to eye Spock, waiting politely in the doorway. The Vulcan made a gesture calling for silence, and pointed to the bathroom interrogatively. McCoy strode in.

"There's no-one here," he called out.

"No-one?" Spock was sufficiently intrigued to follow McCoy in without courteously waiting for an invitation.

"No-one. What made you think there was?" McCoy demanded.

"I heard then."

"But these rooms are sound-proofed... Oh, curse all super-sensitive Vulcan ears!" McCoy said. "Just how much can you hear through these walls?"

"More than I would wish to, occasionally," Spock admitted.

"And you heard someone in here?"

"Yes. She was singing."

"Singing?" McCoy grimed. "I don't usually ask 'em in to sing to me, Spock."

"A Vulcan song," Spock added.

"Vulcan?" McCoy repeated thoughtfully. "It's odd how the Vulcan theme keeps cropping up, isn't it? You don't think we've got a stowaway, do you?"

"No Vulcan would behave so illogically."

"No," McCoy conceded. "I suppose you're right. Anyhow, it's a crazy idea. No mere humanoid can get aboard this ship except by shuttle or ..."

transporter and you soon notice any illegal entry attempt made that way."

Spock was not listening to him. "We did stop over at Vulcan recently," he pointed out.

McCoy stared at him blankly. "Well, I know we did, but you said yourself no Vulcan is going to behave so illogically."

"I may have been wrong." Spock was steeping his hands, bending his face to them.

McCoy hated to see Spock expose himself so carelessly to the possible dangers of an alien mind.

"Spock... Ho!"

It was useless. The dark eyes were blankly unseeing.

McCoy watched helplessly for a moment, then catching movement in his peripheral vision, swung round to see who it was.

"Oh, it's you, Jim. Come in."

"Your door was wide open," Kirk said, coming into the room, "and I heard you yelling at Spock from down the corridor. What's going on?"

"Spock heard someone in here. When we arrived they'd gone."

"And he's trying a mind-touch? Whatever for?"

"Because she was singing in Vulcan, I guess."

"Vulcan!? She!?"

"Spock only said she was singing a Vulcan song," McCoy explained. He grinned. "It could have been Uhura."

"You should be so lucky!" Kirk grinned back. "Isn't it time he snapped out of it?"

McCoy nodded tightly. "I do wish he wouldn't do this."

Kirk smiled affectionately. "Hate to see him expose himself emotionally, don't you?" he said softly.

McCoy looked a little shame-faced. "It is a very personal thing; it isn't easy for him."

"No," Kirk agreed. The dark eyes were beginning to come alive again. He walked up and held the thin shoulders tightly. "Find anything?"

"Yes." Spock nodded. "You were right, Doctor. We do have a stowaway."

"A Vulcan stowaway?" McCoy asked in disbelief.

"Yes."

"Well, where is she?" McCoy demanded.

"Please follow me."

Spock led them down to the cargo bays and opening a door, pointed inside. Kirk and McCoy peered over his arm.

"Why," McCoy said in an accusatory whisper, "she's little more than a baby, Spock."

"Quite old enough to be responsible for her actions," Spock said firmly. "She must have some logical reason for such inexcusable behaviour."

"You cold-hearted, unfeeling..."

The angry tone brought the child awake. She sat up, clutching at the missing teddy bear defensively, looking at the three unexpected faces in turn.

Kirk and McCoy smiled reassuringly and stepped forward, only to find that the child shrank away from them.

"It's all right, my dear," McCoy said soothingly. "No-one's going to get cross with you."

"That's right." Kirk crouched down beside her. "You're quite safe now. What's your name?"

The black eyes stared back silently.

"Tell the Captain your name," Spock said firmly.

"T'Liza," the child said, flashing him a swift look.

"It's all right," McCoy said again. "He's not going to be cross with you, are you?"

The eyebrows flared. "I am a Vulcan, Doctor. Naturally I am not going to be 'cross' with her, as you so quaintly put it. However, I do expect an explanation of her highly illogical and improper behaviour."

"Not now," McCoy said angrily. "At least let's make her feel at home first."

Spock's eyes flicked swiftly round the tiny room, taking in the purloined items, the makeshift bed of Kirk's Aurigan robe and Chekov's pillow. He averted his eyes just as swiftly. At least the child was too young to have made much of the robe's shifting patterns - he could be grateful for that.

"It seems to me that she has made herself too much at home," he said coldly. "Is stealing the way of a Vulcan, T'Liza?"

She looked down, her bottom lip quivering a little.

"Don't," Kirk begged softly. "Don't cry, love."

Her head came slowly round towards him, her eyes widening in shock. "A Vulcan does not cry," she said firmly. She looked back at Spock. "It is not stealing to take what one needs for survival," she said uncertainly.

"You cannot alter facts by circumstances," Spock said severely. "To appropriate what is not yours, for whatever reason, is stealing. Sometimes it can be justified. Can you justify this?"

Slowly, very slowly, she shook her head.

"Leave her alone," McCoy said sharply. "There's plenty of time later to go into the rights and wrongs of it all. For now we need to see she is all right, and to find out why she's here."

"I have been endeavouring to find out why she is here." Spock spoke with extreme patience. "Your interference is well meant, Doctor, but it is ill timed. You would do well to let me handle this in a way the child understands."

Kirk had been watching the child closely, and came to a decision. She was Vulcan, after all, and it must make sense to let Spock deal with her in the way she was used to. He and McCoy were only frightening her, although she was trying hard not to show it.

"He's right, Bones," he said quietly. "You know him too well to think he'll upset her."

McCoy looked at T'Liza, caught her eye, and smiled again. She drew back, clinging tightly to the bear in her arms.

The Doctor sighed. "I still think a little loving and reassurance are what she needs," he mumbled over his shoulder as he straightened up. "If you do upset her, I'll not let you forget it in a hurry." He stepped back to let the Vulcan past.

As Spock approached the child got to her feet and laid the bear down on the tumbled gown. The picture it made was so incongruous that Kirk had to bite the inside of his cheek hard to keep from laughing aloud.

Spock stood facing the child, looking down. She put her shoulders back,

clasping her hands behind her back in unconscious imitation of his stance.

"Why are you here, T'Liza?"

"I wish to join my father on Colony 12."

"Since you have resorted to unauthorised travel on board a Starship I am to assume that this is contrary to your father's wishes in the matter."

The small chin went up. "My father does not know the full facts of the situation. If he did he would doubtless have sent for me."

"Please inform me of the full facts."

"My mother is dead. My aunt, T'Filar, cared for me." The child hung her head. "T'Filar does not understand."

Kirk saw a sudden stillness in Spock's always calm demeanour. "Your father's name?" The words were almost spoken sharply.

"Satur."

"I see." It seemed that he did, for the child nodded, looking up at him.

"You knew my mother?" she asked.

Spock shook his head. "No, t'ky'ta, I did not. But I have heard of her."

The chin went up even more defiantly. "Father says she was a most gracious lady."

"The word of a father is to be accepted," Spock nodded. "How did you get on board, T'Liza? In the cargo we transported up from Vulcan?"

"Yes. I hid in a small box, too small to hold a grown person. No-one suspected."

"A logical method," Spock agreed. "But it was wrong to do so, you understand."

She hung her head. "I understand, but it was... necessary."

"I understand also. I will speak to Satur myself when we get to Colony 12."

"You will?" She gazed up, and expression compounded of hope and disbelief on her tiny face. "Why should he listen to you?"

"Because I have some specialised knowledge of your problems, T'Liza. I am Sarek's son."

"Thee are... Spock?" The words were tinged with awe. Almost immediately the tiny face was blank again. "I apologise, Spock. I showed emotion."

"Doubtless the reason was sufficient," Spock replied calmly. "You will come with us now. Dr. McCoy must examine you and make sure you are physically well, and tomorrow Captain Kirk will decide what must be done with you."

As T'Liza obediently went to McCoy he looked across at Kirk. "May I go with the child to Sickbay, Captain?"

"Of course, Spock. I'll see to tidying up in here." He grinned, slightly embarrassed. "That's... uh... my robe she's been using as a blanket. I think I'll put it away myself."

"Very understandable," Spock acknowledged blandly.

"You'd better take this for her." Kirk got his revenge by dumping the teddy bear into Spock's arms and waving him out of the small room after McCoy and T'Liza.

* * *

McCoy conducted the examination in near-silence, gave the child a gentle pat, told her she was fit and healthy, and handed her over to the care of Christine Chapel for the night. She left Spock a little reluctantly, but the

Vulcan was firm with her and she made no audible protest as she went.

McCoy dragged Spock into his office to find Kirk had arrived and was waiting for them.

"Well?" Kirk said impatiently.

Spock raised an interrogative eyebrow.

"Look, that conversation may have cleared it all up for you," Kirk told him, "but it left me in just as much of a fog as I was before. Why did she stow away?"

"I believe I might be able to guess," McCoy said slowly. "At least, now that I've examined her. She's half-Human, isn't she, Spock?"

"Yes. Her mother was Elizabeth Keston."

"Oh yes. She died when the child was born," McCoy recalled.

"But why is she running away from Vulcan?" Kirk demanded. "And why isn't she with her father in the first place?"

"Because an orphaned female child is traditionally brought up by a female relative, in this case her father's sister. But I believe T'Liza would be better off in the care of her father, who may be more... understanding of her particular needs and problems."

Understanding flooded Kirk. He'd often thought privately that the little he'd heard of Spock's childhood sounded unbearably hard and unnecessarily confusing. Small wonder the maturing Spock had found it essential to get away and seek his own identity in the anonymity of Starfleet. He viewed his First Officer with compassion.

"Childhood is never easy for those who are different," he said softly. "Make sure her father understands, Spock."

His friend's eyes slid uncomfortably away from the look, but he nodded. "I will do my best for her, Captain. We should send a message to Vulcan concerning her safety."

"Lord, yes," Kirk said guiltily. "We should have done so at once. Her aunt must be going crazy with worry."

"A somewhat picturesque description," Spock murmured, "but I believe it may be a valid one."

"You can come and help me word it," Kirk told him.

"I have also promised to speak to Lieutenant-Commander Scott for T'Liza," Spock said.

"To Scotty? Whatever for?"

"It is his bear that she has taken to bed with her," Spock explained.

Kirk laughed. "Don't let any of the crew hear you say that, Mister. They might get the wrong idea! And I didn't think Vulcan children were permitted such things as cuddly toys."

"They are not. I believe I said that T'Liza experiences needs that a full Vulcan child does not. However, her recognition of her own needs for food, warmth and companionship shows that the general tenor of her mind is Vulcan in outlook. She has cared for herself excellently well."

"I'd go along with that," Kirk smiled. "A Human child would probably have eaten enough of those candy bars in the first day to have made themselves thoroughly sick! I suppose she's been using the ventilation ducts as a crawl-way."

"A logical deduction," Spock said soberly. "One can only be grateful that the system has required no flushing over the last few weeks."

Kirk paled. "Don't, Spock," he shuddered. "It doesn't bear thinking about."

* * *

Over the remaining week of their journey to Colony 12, the Enterprise crew grew accustomed to the sight of their imperturbable First Officer being accompanied everywhere by his faithful shadow and her precious bear, formally presented to her by a self-conscious Chief Engineer and duly named Montgomery in his honour. It was Scott's private opinion that it would be at least another month before some of his junior technicians wiped the smiles completely off their faces, but he was not unduly worried. The wee lassie's obvious pleasure, albeit well-covered by her Vulcan manners, was well worth a little temporary loss of dignity on his part.

Many of the more sentimentally-minded crewwomen attempted to mother the child, but T'Liza clearly did not care for such open displays of emotion and resisted all such blandishments, staying firmly close to the man who had become her hero.

Watching him say a formal goodnight to her in the rec room on their last evening, Kirk even felt a little choky himself.

"That's quite a girl," he said softly. He noted the tiny flicker of response in Spock's eyes and added accusingly, "And don't try to kid me you haven't become fond of her."

Spock shot him a swiftly enigmatic look. "Dr. McCoy is of the opinion that I demonstrate more affection towards the library computer."

"Bones was only trying to get a rise, as usual," Kirk grinned, "and you very well know it. He was only saying to me this afternoon that you'd make some child a lovely father."

Spock could not quite cover his unease, and Kirk relented at once. "Seriously, you have coped wonderfully well with her. We'd have been lost without you. She doesn't respond to any of us the way she does to you."

Spock studied the toes of his boots, well aware of the revealing nature of his reply.

"It is simply because she has been brought up in the Vulcan way, Captain, and that is what she understands. I suspect that she reacts inwardly to Human smiles and gestures of affection in a way that she finds worrying, and that is why she turns to me."

"You know," Kirk said suddenly, leaning forward confidentially, "if you could bring yourself to do it, you could be a great help to kids like T'Liza. They must have special needs which haven't been properly recognised up to now. If you could be quite open with her father about your own childhood, he may see to it that a proper study is made of the problem and old mistakes are avoided."

He paused, wondering if perhaps he had said too much. The silence lengthened, and at last Spock said, "I shall consider your suggestion, Captain."

Relieved and satisfied, Kirk nodded and changed the subject.

BETRAYER OR BETRAYED?

They told me you were waiting.
 I nodded and turned, walking
 swiftly towards the place of
 our appointment.
 Unnoticed, you stood...
 almost surrounded, by the throngs
 of people hurrying to and fro
 towards their own individual destinations.
 To them, another human being
 one more or less could make no difference
 in the pattern of their lives.

Fools!

Do they not know of whom
 they so unconcernedly pass by?
 Have they so quickly forgotten
 the reality of past events?
 And have you too become another
 paper hero?

Surely not
 K'nea - Dear God
 let it be not.

I thought you had not changed.
 Still proud - you stand with easy grace.
 How long has it been?
 I know not.
 All the endless days
 and lonely months
 become hours, minutes,
 and are forever gone.
 Forgotten...
 in the dearness of your presence.
 You seem so tired and lost...
 Have they done that?
 Or was it you?
 Have heart and soul rebelled against the soft and silken
 threads that so securely bind
 and hold you fast?
 You turn, and once again
 I rejoice that I have known you
 as lips curve in a smile of greeting
 and hands are outstretched in welcome.
 My silent thoughts reach out.

Forgive me,
 I tried to tell you, to reach and stop
 the masquerade, that they had lured you in.
 Do you see and recognise
 the machinery at work?

"Rejoice in your good fortune?"

I hear your words as in a dream.

"A lifetime's chance?"

Do you still not know what they
 have done to you?

Surely not
 K'nea - Dear God
 let it be not.

And now - how will I reach you?
 A moment's hesitation, that's all it took
 as for the first time - we stood as strangers.
 Cold and chill
 I hear again your voice
 as I have heard so many times
 in wakening moments and in the depths
 of darkest sleep
 and wept inside.

"Et tu, Brutus?"
 And watched helplessly,
 as something precious
 that was between us died.

SIREN

I suppose that I should have known
 That she would never really give me up.

For the past three years
 I've made myself believe
 That I had relinquished all claims on her;
 That I could release the burden
 And give her safe-keeping into someone else's hands,
 And travel on, without regret,
 In the new direction my life had taken.

How could I have possibly forgotten
 The way her beauty can affect me?
 Even here, surrounded by the paraphernalia of drydock,
 She is majestic;
 A lady who sits patiently, resting a little while,
 Until she can be free again among the stars.
 For, though changed, she is somehow changeless,
 Her spell is as strong,
 Her allure as powerful
 As the day I first set eyes on her.

And for all the promises I made to myself
 That this was only a temporary measure;
 For all the logic with which I convinced myself
 That I was only doing this out of necessity;
 For all the times I told myself
 That she already belongs to another,
 I know I'll not rest
 Until she's mine again.

WORK OUT1

//Hanging, waiting, ripe, ready. The moment is here, frozen into eternity, stretching into an age, a point of time held immobile while all else marched on. I wait forever, and forever I wait, imprisoned in the moment, held captive until it is done, and time passes once more. Is it now? Is this he? Movement stirs, the first since the beginning, coming closer, closer, closer... I am held, flung, flucked, taken. I pass, and the moment is gone. Time is unlocked and all things start again as life continues; I continue. Here is my being, released from captivity into bondage, but now there is power, surging in restless waves that consume and consummate. There is strife, the heritage of the stars themselves, a richness unthought of. And fires, now banked, ready to flame forth at a touch; and a visionary, sensuous awareness, transcending consciousness. A vital and enduring spirit. It is well chosen.//

* * *

Fascinating. The fruit, red and succulent only seconds earlier, crumbles to dust in my hand. There appear to be no others like it on the tree. A pity. I put the remnants into a small specimen bag for analysis on the ship, and turn to go. Seven point three two minutes to beam-up time; at my normal walking speed, I can reach the designated point in five point eight minutes. There is no need to hurry. I continue to study my tricorder as I walk, making full use of all the available time. The quest for knowledge is endless and limitless, and the part I play in it very small, but it would be illogical - indeed, criminal - not to play that part to the best of my ability. Vulcan, for all the Academy's vast facilities and resources, cannot contain my curiosity. Only the infinity of space is big enough. Jim says the stars are in his blood; a fanciful expression, perhaps, but I understand. They're there in mine, too.

The tricorder continues to confirm the absence of any animal life on the planet, as our initial sensor scans indicated. An unusual feature in a world as lushly vegetated as this one, but a routine trip otherwise. One more item for the catalogue : ZK 7632 - Class M, habitable, no intelligent life, no adverse factors, suitable for colonisation.

Ensigns Danvers and Muchato are at the beam-up point before me, lounging against a tree and chatting. Inconsequential conversation is a Human habit I have never fully acquired, and I am aware that my inadequacy in this area makes me somewhat tedious company. But am I Vulcan or Human? I have never understood the urge among certain members of the crew to 'de-Vulcanise' me, almost as though they felt that side of my nature to be an aberration which could be removed by psychiatric treatment. Why can they not see that I am what I am, and what I am is neither Human nor Vulcan? I can but follow the dictates of my nature, as do they. If I can accept them for what they are, why can they not do the same for me? Though to be fair, there are those, notably Jim, who do just that, for which I am grateful.

Danvers and Muchato straighten up as they see me, and I ask for their report. They comply, and meanwhile the other members of the landing party appear one by one. When all are assembled I take out my communicator.

"Spock to Enterprise. Six to beam up."

Sight fades and clears again. I step down from the transporter pad and leave the room. I know that standard procedure will be followed without my having to order it. The transporter operator will log our return and report it to the Captain if he has been requested to do so. The landing party will have an hour in which to draw up their reports before we assemble in the briefing room with the Captain. Routine. Calm, reassuring routine. No mishaps, no casualties, no mysteries to upset the smooth running of the ship. Of course, it can't always be like this, nor would we want it to be. But these periods of calm are always doubly welcome because we know that next week, tomorrow, in five minutes, something could happen and routine be shattered once more. Then

the ship becomes tense with suppressed excitement - this is what we signed up for. The interludes, in contrast, carry an aura of almost church-like peace, which is very therapeutic and relaxing, as long as it doesn't last too long. A bored crew is an inefficient crew, but Jim is a good enough Captain to see that they stay alert, and incidents of disaffection are rare.

I take my samples, including the dust, to the botany labs, and request that they be analysed and the results sent to my quarters. I know that they will be ready before the debriefing session, and the satisfaction I derive from this knowledge reinforces my view that the fight to establish order in the face of chaos is the highest calling open to man. Meanwhile, I go and see Jim.

His welcoming smile as I enter his quarters produces the familiar tingle of pleasure. No-one else has ever responded to me in this way, and the fact that Jim does so is a constant source of wonder to me. To be cared for is a pleasant thing, and the rapport I share with this man has been one of the sublime experiences of my life. Of my own feelings I have never spoken, but there is an old Earth saying which my mother was very fond of quoting: 'Actions speak louder than words'. Jim understands.

As I sit, he pushes aside the mound of paperwork on his desk, and props his chin on one hand, waiting for me to speak.

"A successful trip, Captain. I don't believe ZK 7632 will present any problems."

"Fine. That's the last one in this system, then. I've just received our new orders. It seems there've been reports of anomalous energy readings on Matro VI, near the Klingon border, and we're to investigate. Should make a change from planet-hopping, anyway."

"Indeed."

He sits back and stretches. "We'll be there in two days, which should give me time to clear this." He indicates the papers on his desk, and sighs. "Don't ever be a Starship Captain, Spock. It's nothing but a desk job."

"That is one of the reasons I have never applied for such a post," I reply, in what I hope is a teasing manner. He smiles again, so I can't have been far wrong.

* * *

Damn it all to hell! Reports in triplicate, requisitions in quadruplicate, acknowledgements, memos... Am I a Starship Captain or a civil servant? What are computers for, anyway? God, I need some action. I can only stand just so much peace and quiet.

A buzz.

"Enter."

Spock, thank God. An excuse to leave all this for a while. Huh, sounds like he didn't have a much more exciting time than I did. But he has this tremendous capacity for being fascinated. The slightest thing, a rock, a flower, something I wouldn't look twice at, absorbs him utterly. I don't believe he knows the meaning of the word boredom.

Well, at least we have the prospect of a little excitement soon, with these new orders. 'Indeed,' he says. What does that mean? Does he know the meaning of the word excitement? Of course he does. It's why he joined Starfleet instead of the Vulcan Academy. Perhaps I should have joined the Vulcan Academy.

"Don't ever be a Starship Captain, Spock. It's nothing but a desk job."

That is one of the reasons I have never applied for such a post.

Yes, my friend, just one of the many reasons. And I'm profoundly grateful for them all.

* * *

"Fancy a game of chess tonight?"

"Yes indeed, Captain, that would be most pleasurable. Now if you will excuse me, I shall go and prepare for the debriefing session."

I rise and leave him. Our chess games have become a regular feature of my life, but I wonder sometimes if Jim can find them as enjoyable as he says. It seems a very sedate activity for a man of his proclivities, and he loses constantly, which must be discouraging. At first, I couldn't understand why he should choose to spend his off-duty hours with me, and even now I find it hard to accept that he can enjoy my company so much. But I can think of no other explanation; and the thought is a pleasant one. But I still don't understand. No man alive could have less in common with me than Jim, unless it be Dr. McCoy. Yet from the start there has been a bond between us, that I can neither ignore nor deny.

* * *

//The Enemy is known, and unknowing. It is formidable, but blind, and can be overcome with careful strategy. The route to it, and the danger, lie in this one. This one has many qualities which are worse than useless, and which must be negated; specifically, the attachment to the Enemy. A powerful weapon if handled correctly. Indeed, I see no other means of destroying the Enemy, and destroyed it must be, for it blocks the path. Without it, much that is now unsuitable in this one will be paralysed or disappear, and the conflicts already present will magnify. My power will increase, expand, reach out beyond the confines of this body, until the ultimate is attained... But first, the Enemy. It must be disposed of.//

* * *

ii

//How soft it is, how weak and vulnerable. One blow would suffice. But the time, though approaching, is not yet right. It must be prepared. Even I could not force this one to take such a step without prior treatment. There is time before we draw near to my fellows, but I must work quickly. Then they will welcome me and succour me; I, the last of our kind. This one will be mine entirely. I shall bring him down, disgrace and humiliate him, nurture bitterness and rancour in a soul already torn and scarred. And my power will extend and grow, and the cloud they dread will rise and engulf them from the very quarter they least look for it - from within! And when this one dies, and I am finally free, I shall join my fellows, and we shall be omnipotent. Our shadow will cover everything; nothing shall escape. Uncounted millions of lives will be ours, until the end of all things.//

* * *

How soft he is, how weak and vulnerable. One blow would suffice. It affords me some anxiety sometimes that these Humans are so puny. So many races we have encountered who could crush a body such as his out of existence, with very little effort, were they so inclined. Yet still they endure, against all the odds. There is a hidden strength, perhaps, which has contributed to their success, a strength of mind rather than muscle; of will, of purpose. For all their fascinating illogicality, which borders sometimes on the frivolous, they seem to possess a clearer vision than many Vulcans of my acquaintance. I like to think that I have inherited something of this trait from my mother, and perhaps picked up more from my long association with Humans. They believe me to be ashamed of the Human within me, which I suppose is why they are constantly trying to bring it out. Perhaps that was true once, but nothing could be further from the truth now; I simply accept it as part of myself.

How slow Jim is in making his moves! I believe he does it merely in an attempt to irritate me. He should know me better... but really, six point seven one minutes is a little excessive, even for Jim.

"Your move, Captain."

He looks up in surprise. "I know."

Perhaps I shouldn't have prompted him.

He makes his move - a poor one, as it turns out, and the game continues. Conversation is desultory.

"I wonder if Koloth and Korax ever play chess?" Jim muses at one point.

A particularly inane remark, so I make no reply. Jim continues, "I wonder what sort of amusements the Klingons go in for. Nobody seems to know much about that side of their character, do they?"

"Perhaps there isn't a 'that side' to their character," I suggest, concentrating on the board.

"Oh, come on now. I thought it was accepted that every advanced species indulges in some form or recreation. Even if it's only meditation."

"Or chess. Given a chance."

"Or chess, yes. Well, isn't it so?"

"It's certainly so that it's an accepted fact. But accepted fact can be several degrees removed from the truth. I personally believe that Klingons get all the amusement they require simply from their normal day-to-day routine of butchery, murder and tyranny."

"Yes, it's hard to imagine anything which could be more fun. But that's just the military, Spock. What about the civilians? You're surely not suggesting that they spend their leisure hours massacring each other?"

"It might be a good thing for us all if they did. But no, I doubt it."

"Still, whatever they do, I bet it's something pretty anti-social."

I look across at Jim, assuming my blandest expression. "Yes, one can imagine them holding national competitions to find the Klingon able to disrupt the greatest number of chess games by talking while his opponent is trying to make a move. You should try it sometime."

"Sorry."

The game continues. Actually, Jim has raised a good point. What do the Klingons do for relaxation? Apart from raping and pillaging? In truth, I find it hard to believe that they can be as black as they are painted by the propagandists. There is a phrase which I have come across in my reading, and which seems to express my meaning: 'All God's chillun got soul'; or in my own, perhaps less picturesque words:

"All sentient creatures
Have some redeeming features."

This I sincerely believe. After all, what do we really know of the Klingons? Contact between our two cultures has been minimal. Could we not have sadly misjudged them? Those things I said to Jim in denigration of them were mere facile remarks, not backed up by any clear thinking, because in truth it's not something I have ever thought deeply about. Now I seem to see certain things with startling clarity. It's people like Jim, people with vested interests at stake, who keep alive the fiction of the Klingons as aggressors. After all, did he not, this very afternoon, compare the relative merits of 'planet hopping' and a possible engagement with the Klingons, and decide in favour of the latter? And this the man who condemns the militaristic tendencies of the so-called aggressors!

Having completed my study of the board, I act. "Checkmate in three moves," I say, pronouncing the words with a peculiar relish.

Jim smiles ruefully. "So much for my disruptive tactics."

Is this an admission? No matter. I have still won.

* * *

Well, it has to be admitted that my game has improved considerably since I started playing with Spock. I can now beat anyone abcard - except him. I suppose I should be grateful, but it gets so damn frustrating at times. There seems little point in sitting down to a game of chess of which the outcome is certain. I just keep praying that one day, one day, I'll beat him.

I wasn't really trying to put him off by chatting like that, of course. It was simply that my mind was wandering. And the beauty of Spock is that he knows. Anyone else might have seriously taken offence, but Spock simply sighs tolerantly and ploughs on. And anyway, he's quite capable of carrying on a conversation whilst playing chess, and probably of solving abstruse mathematical equations in his head at the same time. Or is he? His powers are undoubtedly very great, but perhaps we sometimes take his superiority for granted. Is he never vulnerable? Indeed he is, as we have discovered once or twice in the past. But he's less vulnerable than we, that's the point. Still, we should never confuse that with absolute invincibility. That would be unfair.

* * *

Thirty paces to the turbo-lift from my quarters. The journey to the Bridge takes eighteen point two seconds. The doors open, then close behind me. Another shift begins.

I sit down at my position to begin work. The results of the analysis of my dust sample were quite remarkable, and deserve further investigation. They reveal that the remains of that red, ripe fruit, and therefore the fruit itself, are in excess of one million years old. I was pleased to see the astonishment I had felt at this information reflected in the faces of those around me at the debriefing session yesterday; Dr. McCoy even treated us to one of his choicer obscenities to indicate his disbelief. It is undoubtedly irrational, but just as undoubtedly true, that I find a certain pleasure in surprising or impressing, or even amusing others. Awkward though I am with individuals, or on a social level, yet an audience has never ~~daunted~~ me. There is a distance, a gulf, between a performer and his audience that I find reassuring.

Jim once suggested that since I felt like that, perhaps I should have stayed at the Vulcan Academy and taken a teaching post; and indeed, on the various occasions when I have been invited to lecture at a University or Science Institute, I have found the experience intensely satisfying. Lecturing combines the traffic of knowledge with a performance before a receptive audience, and few things are as stimulating. Yet I willingly forgo them both to continue in the life I lead. This was my conscious choice, to be actually at the interface between the known and the unknown, and not cushioned behind the lines, where most knowledge is second-hand.

Furthermore, I felt, at the time of making that decision, that deep space offered the more congenial working atmosphere to one who didn't belong. I have found belonging of a sort here, but I know I am not fully accepted. Even the Captain, who should know better, has on more than one occasion taunted me with my hybrid nature. Am I never to be free of the stigma of being a half-breed? What precisely is the nature of the shame attached to this state? I have never understood it, but I feel it ~~nonetheless~~, since to others it is so obviously a shameful thing.

I had thought to have escaped this prejudice here on the Enterprise, but I begin to see I was deceived. Humans, by their very nature, are confirmed hypocrites, as witness Jim's anti-Klingon attitude last night. I suppose it is not entirely their fault; having evolved without many of the attributes necessary to a higher, star-going civilisation, they have been forced to assume them, while still retaining, underneath, their native barbarism. They are without doubt hard-working and intelligent, but I, and others like me, feel that the esteemed and powerful position ~~they~~ occupy in the Federation is unwarranted. They make a show of being a rational, peace-loving and open-minded people, yet their own history demonstrates that this is decidedly not so. Contact with other, more ~~oivilised~~ cultures shamed them into adopting this pretence, and for

several hundred years they have been accepted at face value.

And these are the people I am forced to work with and serve under! Well, I see what must be done. The calling of their bluff is long overdue.

Captain Kirk arrives on the Bridge. Ship's time is 0804 - he is late. One of the marks of a good Captain is his punctuality.

One of the distinguishing characteristics of Vulcans is their punctuality.

* * *

//It responds well, and after so short a time! Truly a sensitive and receptive nature...//

* * *

0804. Must ask Bones not to tell such good stories at the breakfast table in future. One of the marks of a good Captain is his punctuality. Spock's here already, of course. The day he's late I'll know there's something seriously wrong with my ship.

"Morning, Spock."

"Captain."

"Status, please."

"We are heading directly for Matro VI at Warp 4, estimated time of arrival 29 hours, 8 minutes. No unauthorised or unidentified ships or other bodies within scanner range."

"All ship-shape and Bristol fashion, eh?"

"Indeed."

Hrm. No reaction. He must be fed up with pretending puzzlement at Human colloquialisms.

A distinctly unattractive yeoman approaches bearing a clipboard and coffee. I sign the report and take the coffee, preparing for what ~~promises~~ to be an uneventful watch. Perhaps Spock will stop by for a chat when he's finished doing whatever he's doing. Not that I'd dream of disturbing him, of course. He's probably working on those dust samples of his which seem to have fascinated him so inordinately.

Well, it was a bit of an eye-opener, wasn't it? Over a million years old! But the strangest thing of all, to my mind, is the fact that, before Spock picked it, that dust was a very tasty-looking fruit, as we saw from the tricorder tapes. Hanging there, so conspicuous and alone, it was almost crying out to be picked. Why did it crumble like that? Have we just destroyed the last representative of an unknown life-form?

Questions like that trouble me constantly. We simply know so little about the Universe that mistakes are inevitable. We try to be careful and responsible, but is that enough? Should we not just retire gracefully before we cause a major catastrophe?

But no; the only way to obtain knowledge is to go out and seek it, and we wouldn't do much of that sitting at home, too timid to venture beyond our atmospheres for fear of the consequences. So the problem remains, and wherever man goes he leaves a trail of chaos and destruction in his wake.

True, we've also spread a great deal of light, but does that restore the balance? I must talk it over with Spock. Vulcans as a whole are notoriously critical of us for just this reason, and Spock must have thought of something to say in defence of his action when he decided to join us.

The hours pass, and it is time for lunch. Spock and I go together, having exchanged not one word since eight o'clock; in fact, he's been down in the lab for much of the morning.

"How's it going, Spock?" I ask.

"If you mean work on the dust, I must report that progress is slow. We have been unable to elicit any further information from it."

"How about giving it the old third degree...? Never mind. Eat your plomik."

"This isn't plomik, it's..."

"Just eat it."

For some minutes we eat in companionable silence. Then Spock says, "I regret I am unable to give you a return game tonight. I have some reports..."

He leaves the sentence hanging in the air, something unusual for one whose normal mode of speech is precise almost to the point of pedantry.

"Even if I promise not to use any underhand Klingon tactics?" I reply teasingly.

He opens his mouth to answer, but I forestall him. "It's all right, Spock. I happen to have a load of work piled up too. Some other time, perhaps?"

He nods.

* * *

Some other time, he said. Not if I can help it. The time is rapidly approaching when the repressed peoples of the Federation will be liberated from the domination of the Human tyrants, and Earth will be seen at last in her true colours. I begin to see how the first blow can be struck. Yes! Remove one of the pillars of the system, one of the most stalwart pillars, and the rest will tumble more easily. That is the part I must play; but how, and when? No matter. The opportunity will present itself. We are rapidly drawing near to the territory of our Klingon brothers. When it is done, and they see I am in good faith, surely we can reach some agreement? Perhaps they will accept us as part of the Imperial Fleet to start with; others will follow, and together we shall form the Grand Allied Fleet of the Liberation. And I shall have begun it; I, Spock of Vulcan, the despised half-breed.

But first... James Kirk must be removed.

* * *

//Yes, the Enemy must be removed, and this one will do it, just as was planned. Oh, we are nearly there. My fellows, can you feel me?

This one does not see what I do not wish him to see. The crew will certainly mutiny before he can carry out the full plan, and he will be arrested, court-martialled and disgraced. In such a proud soul, what can I not do then? Already the seeds of bitterness are taking root. I shall warp and twist and finally ~~destroy~~ him, and all the while I shall feed and grow strong on his grievance and rancour. What a feast he will make! And when I have squeezed him dry he will die, and I shall be free at last, free to join with my fellows.

Then and only then will the plan be accomplished, and they will be proud of me. For I will have brought them such power, and from a source they never thought to conquer. These people will be unable to fight, unable to see that the thing they fear is here, among them. They will fall, and we shall be undisputed Lords of the Universe. Nothing will move save that we will it. Nothing will live except for our pleasure. Nothing will die unless we have no further use for it.

Oh my fellows! You think yourselves terrible because your minions are fierce and cruel and harry these freedom-loving people. I tell you, you are as naught to what you will be. Not just Klingons, but all things, all things under our sway. And I shall have begun it; I, the last of our kind.

But first... the Enemy must be removed.//

* * *

iii

//It must look like an accident, of course. The truth must not be known until it is too late. The time is rapidly approaching, and an opportunity must be made. This one must act.//

* * *

It must look like an accident, of course. The truth must not be known until it is too late. Then they will see it had to be done. The time is rapidly approaching - we arrive at Matro VI in fifteen point four seven hours. An opportunity must be made. I must act.

I turn at my desk and activate the intercom. Jim's face appears, looking tired. It is perhaps a somewhat unusual hour for what I have in mind, but Jim has said he finds it relaxing after a bout of desk-work. In addition, there is a 93.2% probability that at this time we shall be alone.

"Good evening, Captain," I say. "I wondered if you would care for a work-out in the gym?"

His eyebrows climb in surprise. I can see he is not impressed by the idea.

"Rather late for that, isn't it? Besides, I haven't finished reading these reports." He lifts a sheaf of papers into view.

"There seem to be too many there to finish tonight," I say encouragingly, I hope.

He stares at me intently for a few moments. He has always had an uncanny knack of reading me when I don't want to be read, and I find myself praying (to whom, I have no idea) that it won't be my undoing now. Finally his face collapses into that peculiar grin that is said to be devastating to all female life-forms at a hundred paces. I myself have felt its effects on occasion.

"What you're trying to say, without actually admitting it," he says, nodding sagely in a manner I find vaguely irritating, "is that you've finished your work, and you're bored. Right?"

"Well..."

"Right. See you there in five minutes."

He cuts the contact, and I sit back, satisfied. The ploy worked, even though at the expense of some personal dignity. Bored, indeed! He forgets I am a Vulcan, just like all the rest of them. Well, soon he will have forgotten everything.

I smile at my little joke, and wonder if it is what Dr. McCoy would describe as being 'in poor taste'. The doctor... I pause on my way to the door. He has a high regard for the Captain. He could cause trouble later. No matter; he can be dealt with later.

I leave my quarters and head for the gym, pondering on the task that lies ahead. Tal-shaya is the method of choice, I think; the quick, clean break. Again, Dr. McCoy could prove to be the stumbling block. Is it not possible that a doctor of his calibre will recognise the technique? But that I should have murdered in cold blood my best, indeed my only friend, will surely be the thought furthest from his mind! It is late - Jim was tired - it was his idea - I should have dissuaded him - he slipped, fell awkwardly...

I trust I can act the part well enough to allay any suspicions that might arise. The grief, anguish, remorse, all fiercely hidden behind a solid wall of unfeeling, yet that very blankness revealing the depths of my agony. That is what McCoy will expect, and that is what he will get.

Jim is already there. I change quickly, and the work-out begins. Again and again I try to manoeuvre him into a position where I can reach for his neck, but each time he slips out of my grasp. He is laughing. He thinks it's

a game. I'll show him just what kind of a game it is we're playing.

Finally he does it for me. He falls, pulling me down on top of him. My hand goes for the neck, fingers feeling for the vertebrae. His face, inches below mine, changes. The sparkles die out of those warm hazel eyes, to be replaced by something cloudy.

Fear?

Jim?

"Spock?" he whispers.

"You have to die..." I hear myself gasping.

"What?"

"Must die."

The fingers tighten, and he tries to squirm loose. But he is pinioned beneath my body, my entire weight is on top of him. He cannot move.

"Spock, wait!"

The eyes are clear and appealing. I cannot refuse them.

"What are you doing? Think! Why are you doing this?"

Why? It was so obvious. But what was it? Help me...

//Do it!//

Do what?

//Kill it.//

Yes. Must kill...

Spock! Don't! Look at me!

Jim.

Yes, Jim. I'm your friend, remember? Why are you trying to kill me?

//Don't listen! Do it!//

You stay out of this. This is between me and him.

Jim. Must kill you, my friend. The people must be liberated. The yoke of Human oppression must be lifted from their shoulders.

What? What people? What yoke? We're not oppressors, you know that.

All the people of the Federation. And the Klingons. The oppressed Klingons.

What? Oh God help me, I'd laugh if you weren't nearly choking me.

//It must be done now. End it, don't listen to the talk. It will betray you. Your Klingon brothers are depending on you.//

What is that?

Unknown. All is unknown. What am I doing? I must kill you, yet... I cannot.

//The Liberation.//

Yes... the Liberation. Forgive me, Jim.

I'll never forgive you.

?

//Don't listen.//

If you kill me, I'll never forgive you. I trusted you, and you've betrayed me.

//Do it!//

Yes, do it, like your friend says. Do it, and know that I curse your name forever. I curse every minute that we spent together, every precious minute. Our friendship meant a great deal to me. I see now that it was nothing to you. Well, okay. Kill me. But may that nothing haunt you for the rest of your life...

No! Jim!

//It has to be now! Now!//

Jim! It was everything! Everything! Listen to me...

//No! No! I cannot be driven out before my time! I shall die!//

Oh, what's happening? Jim, help!

It's okay, Spock, it's okay.

//It's too strong. I am dying... Too late... too late...//

* * *

He slumps forward, nearly knocking the breath out of me. The sound of his breathing at my ear is harsh and shallow.

What the devil was it?

Whatever it was, it appears to have gone.

"Okay, Spock, it's okay," I whisper, unsure whether he can hear me. "It's gone now."

My arms, freed at last, slide over his back and enclose him in a gentle hug.

* * *

Warmth and darkness. A pleasant, secure, safe feeling. A low voice whispering to me. If I concentrate, I can make out what it's saying.

"...it's all right, Spock. It's gone."

What's gone? Where am I? That's Jim's voice... What are we doing?

I open my eyes. The floor is within centimetres of my nose. I appear to be lying full-length... on top of Jim... who has his arms around me...

I struggle to sit up and free myself from his grasp.

"Captain?" I ask, raising an eyebrow. "What's happening?"

"Well, what does it look like, Mr. Spock? We're working out."

ALTERNATIVE UNIVERSE

Alien eyes full of gentle skies
and the warm promise of heaven.

From the depths of a torn heart
Love came, unbidden.
From an understanding mind
Love found expression.

Though I may appear cold...
You see beyond.
The smile my lips deny my eyes
 have given...

TO YOU...

For I would hold you safe...
Light of my life...
Heart of my heart...

I would lay down my honour...
FOR YOU...

I will be gentle
For you are my life...
I will walk by your side
FOREVER...

Bound are we...
With chains of sparkling light
Each stands alone...
Yet we are together...

United in our love...

In another Universe
There is another me... another you
I grieve for him but must remain...
In this universe...

WITH YOU...

And so a shy love grew strong...
Warmed by light and laughter
Dark eyes shone with caring, hazel
 eyes replied...

The Bond was forged...

Walking hand in hand
 two souls became one.

Alien eyes full of fiery skies
and the cold, cold breath of hell.

From the frozen depths of a twisted heart
Came an unbidden love.
Flooding the core of a sick mind
Came the expression of that love.

For I must hurt you...
Find pleasure in your pain.
You will bend your proud head
 before me...

AND BEG...

For I would crush you...
Fire of my eyes...
Flame of my heart...

No-one shall touch you...
BUT I...

There will be no tenderness
You sear my mind...
In pain will I take you...
FOREVER...

Bound are we...
All your tears cannot break the chain
They only spur me on...
To greater torture... humiliation...

And you will never know... I LOVE YOU...

In another Universe
There is another side of me...
But you are doomed...
Just as I...

To dwell in MY UNIVERSE...

And so died an unborn love...
Crushed by hate for Human weakness
Vulcan fires could not understand...

The Bond was forged...

Love and hate walked hand in hand
 and two souls were lost.

THE CONNING OF CAPTAIN KIRK

"So Sherman's Planet is promised a bumper harvest?"

Kirk's communicator bleeped and he turned aside with a word of apology to Lurry and flicked it open.

"Kirk here. Come in, Enterprise."

"Spock here, Captain. We are picking up some rather unusual readings on the sensors. It would be desirable for you to beam up as soon as possible in case we need a command decision."

"On my way, Spock. Kirk out."

He replaced his communicator and moved towards the space-station transporter point with Lurry trotting after him.

"That's the way it goes, Mr. Lurry. Never a moment's peace. Fortunately we've finished our business."

"Trouble, Captain?" Lurry asked, pushing a pile of assorted tribbles off the transporter pad.

"Nothing definite, but Spock isn't given to panicking."

"Indeed not," Lurry smiled; he had come to know the imperturbable First Officer very well. "Wait a moment, Captain," he continued as Kirk was about to give the signal to energise.

Kirk paused in surprise, then grinned as Lurry carefully removed a tribble that had crawled, or rolled, or anyway moved itself onto Kirk's boot. He raised the communicator again, but once more Lurry stopped him, this time removing a large golden tribble, the colour of his shirt, which the Captain had tucked under his arm without even noticing it.

"All clear now, Captain, and a tribble-free journey!" Lurry stepped back and waved a handful of tribble as the golden transporter shimmer took the Captain away from Space Station K-7.

On board the Enterprise Chief Kyle moved the controls carefully into the up-position and watched as the shimmer started to form on the pad. Kirk appeared and was just about to step off the platform when a new shower of gold enveloped him and he vanished again. Nor did he reappear on either K-7 or the Enterprise.

Captain's log. Stardate 4542.7. Commander Spock recording. While beaming aboard from Space Station K-7, Captain Kirk disappeared in a transporter effect whose source we have so far been unable to trace. I am remaining in orbit around K-7 while Mr. Scott endeavours to identify the coordinates used. Repeated searches of the station have revealed no sign of the Captain.

Spock clicked off the log and turned towards the communications console.

"Any unusual activity on the communications board in the last fifteen minutes, Lieutenant?" he asked quietly.

"Nothing, sir, except that..."

"Except what, Lieutenant?"

"Well, just after you had called the Captain, before he signalled the transporter, I received a repeat, a sort of echo of his last words, 'On my way. Kirk out.' It was about two minutes after he had spoken."

There was a few seconds total silence on the Bridge. Spock gazed straight before him, his fingers steepled in his usual thoughtful pose. No-one moved. No-one even breathed noisily. Then the tension broke.

"Mr. Chekov, run a complete scan of all sensor activity recorded during the last twenty-seven minutes. Lieutenant Uhura, I want the same thing for

communications. If there has been any other echo or repetition, even of the smallest sound, I want to know it at once. I shall be in the transporter room. You have the con, Mr. Sulu."

Spock left the room as rapidly as he had spoken, and the remaining Bridge crew looked at each other in surprise. Had he some idea of what had happened to Captain Kirk?

Kirk would have been glad to have somebody to explain it to him, too. He had materialised in a long empty corridor with numbered doors on each side. The floor was carpeted and the lighting was subdued. After a moment's shocked stillness he flicked open the communicator and tried to raise the ship.

"Kirk to Enterprise. Come in, Enterprise."

Nothing happened. He turned up the control to maximum and tried again.

"Kirk to Enterprise. Kirk to Enterprise."

The communicator remained totally dead and finally he shrugged, closed it, and replaced it on his belt. Wherever he was, he was obviously not going to get away from it immediately, so here he was with a new world to explore, and it was up to him to boldly go and do so.

Ahead of him the corridor curved round to the right and he became aware of a muffled sound of music and an increase of light from beyond the corner. Moving warily, all his senses alert, he walked softly down the corridor and, dropping on one knee, peeked round the corner.

The light came from a partly-open door a few feet along the passage, which otherwise exactly resembled the one in which he had materialised. No-one was in sight, so with the same caution he started towards the light.

Suddenly a door on the other side opened, and before he could duck back behind the corner two figures came out talking and turned away from him along the corridor. They were obviously absorbed in their conversation and never noticed Kirk, which was just as well as he stood there with his mouth agape.

The man and woman, for they were obviously Human, were not only speaking English, but were wearing Starfleet uniforms, the man in a red shirt and the woman, who was young and attractive (Kirk was not too stunned to see that), was in Science Section blue.

Only a word or two of their conversation was clear, but it was certainly to do with a party, and when they pushed open the door Kirk had already noticed the sound of music became more clearly audible. It seemed safe to assume that this was the location of the party. But what place could this be, with old-fashioned-looking, carpeted corridors and Starfleet uniforms?

Creeping closer to the door Kirk was relieved to see that the light was from a low-placed lamp, probably on the floor. Only feet, or people sitting down, were visible. The room was very crowded, and after a moment's hesitation he decided it was safe, in that light, to risk getting fairly close to the door. Folding his arms to hide the tell-tale Captain's gold rings on his sleeves he walked boldly up to the open doorway and glanced in quickly but as casually as he could. No-one took any notice. Most people's backs were to the door and they were holding glasses. A red sleeve suddenly came into sight grasping a bottle which looked suspiciously like Scotty's favourite drink.

"Move on, chum - you'll never get a drink if you wait in the doorway. Anyway, you're keeping us from the liquor as well."

The sudden voice behind him then acquired a large and hearty hand that shoved him firmly into the room, so that he almost fell over the feet of a girl squatting on the floor, crooning to herself. Before he had recovered two men pushed past him and advanced on the red sleeve with the bottle, waving their empty glasses.

"Didn't you bring your glass, chum?" said the voice, which could now be seen to belong to a dark young man in blue trousers and a green sweater. "Never mind," he continued, "I expect Jay can find an empty one. Don't bother about rinsing it, darling - he won't get foot and mouth disease from whisky."

In a moment Kirk found himself established in a corner away from the door, with a glass of whisky in his hand. There was no way of getting out without attracting attention to himself, so he concentrated on keeping in the shadow as much as possible, and on discouraging, not too hard, the friendly overtures of an attractive blonde in a clinging and decidedly non-uniform mini-dress.

The whisky was good, too, and Red Sleeve was generous in her libations so that Kirk was soon enjoying himself despite his rather precarious situation. Suddenly he was brought back to red-alert as a couple of black and silver figures walked past the open door.

Klingons!

"Klingons? Mr. Chekov, are you certain?"

"Quite certain, Mr. Spock," the young Russian insisted. "It's only a half sentence, but the computer insists that the speakers are Klingons."

"What was the exact time of the phrase?"

"Twenty-three point seven minutes before the Captain disappeared, sir."

Spock turned away from the intercom screen and watched silently for a moment as Scotty checked the circuits. Kyle stood by, trying to help Scotty and keep out of Spock's way simultaneously. Not that the Vulcan had expressed the least criticism of Kyle. That was not his way. But Kirk was missing from the Enterprise, and Kyle was acutely aware that it was he who had been at the controls. And now there was talk of Klingons!

As soon as the Klingons were out of sight Kirk started to disentangle himself, a little reluctantly, from the blonde and the whisky. With a muttered excuse he began to work his way through the throng towards the corridor. The blonde transferred her attention to the young man in the green sweater.

"Who was that, Jo?" she murmured. "I don't know him."

"No idea," retorted Jo. "Can't tell one bloke from another in those uniforms."

Unaware of this dialogue Kirk was making his way carefully along the corridor in the direction taken by the Klingons. He was more and more puzzled by the anomalies of this place. He had thought for a moment that it might be some night-spot on Earth which had retained the old-style furnishings as a tourist attraction. But that was now right out. Nowhere on Earth would you find Klingons walking about freely in full uniform and carrying weapons!

Pausing at a corner he peered round and saw the Klingons standing by a lift. It seemed, in keeping with the general archaic setting, to be the old push-button kind which had long been replaced by voice commanded models.

As soon as the Klingons had entered the lift and started downwards, he moved over to the door and watched the lighted panel to see which floor they stopped at. He found that he was on floor 9, and the lift stopped at floor 1 and then went on down to Ground. Kirk pressed the recall button but the lift was already on its way back up. In a couple of minutes the doors opened and a group of people pushed him aside and, without a second glance in his direction, made their way down the corridor towards the party.

Kirk gazed after them in surprise. There were several Starfleet uniforms, two or three in civvies, and two women in obvious but unfamiliar uniforms of light blue tunics and trousers. The odd thing was that they were wearing arrow-head badges, of a novel colour and background, but indisputably and

basically Enterprise badges!

What could Enterprise personnel, in these odd uniforms, be doing here? The situation was becoming more and more confusing, and Kirk was getting angry. His temper was not improved when he saw that the lift had gone again while he was staring at the uniforms. He banged the recall button hard and hurt his hand; a few of Scotty's choicer oaths chased through his mind, but fortunately the lift arrived empty this time and he was able to start down again in pursuit of the Klingons. After a moment's thought he decided to go only as far as the first floor in case that was where the Klingons had stopped. He could go on down afterwards if it seemed appropriate.

When the door opened Kirk had yet another shock. Ahead of him was a large reception area with seats and lights. There was a bar in one corner, and numbers of people were gathered round it, or sitting on the seats talking or reading old-style paper books. Kirk moved out of the way of a couple who wanted to get in the lift. Fortunately, with so many people around, his anonymity seemed fairly safe. He moved cautiously towards the bar, his eyes checking every corner or group for a glimpse of a black and silver uniform. He didn't find any Klingons, but he did find some tribbles.

"Tribbles on the transporter pad, Mr. Lurry?"

"Yes, Commander, I removed them just before the Captain beamed up."

"Thank you, Mr. Lurry. That may be a useful piece of information. Spock out."

Useful is not the word most people would have associated with tribbles, and these were no exception. There were three or four in the room, mostly being worn or carried by young women. It was extraordinary how women were attracted by these furry little pests, Kirk thought, remembering wryly what it felt like to be up to his neck in them. That was an idea! Could these be some kind of space-port recreational facilities?

A sudden burst of sound as a door opened snapped his attention back to the present. It was unmistakably a red-alert signal, yet no-one was taking any notice! Tribbles were forgotten as he strode quickly towards the source of the sound which had now stopped as suddenly as it had begun.

Large double doors near one corner of the room attracted his attention. Surely it was through them that the alert sound had come. There was a glass panel in each door and Kirk peered through for a moment. The room inside was dark, and seemed full of people. Suddenly one of the heads in front of the door moved aside and Kirk found himself gazing at part of a large viewscreen on which was visible what could only be a Starship Bridge, but staffed entirely by officers in the strange blue uniforms.

The doors were not fastened and Kirk slipped inside and edged his way to one side to get a clearer view. At that moment the screen showed the navigation console. Well, well! A Deltan navigator! He knew they were very good, but they could certainly cause problems on a ship. How was the Captain coping with this one? he wondered.

Someone pushed past him at that moment, but he quickly moved back into the place where he could see the screen. The First Officer had turned round from the computer and said something which Kirk did not catch. Not a Vulcan, he thought, as he watched the expressive, excited young face. The picture changed to the command chair as the Captain turned to answer the First Officer.

With a shock of cold horror Kirk found himself gazing into his own face!

"I think I have it, Mr. Spock!" Scotty stood back from the transporter

and took a deep breath. Spock raised an interrogative eyebrow, but said nothing.

"It seems," Scott continued, "that some kind of parallel series of events became entangled in the continuum and the Captain beamed up in one time line and back down in a parallel one. The coordinates can be plotted to bring him back to this time line again, in precisely five point three minutes."

"Can we contact the Captain before that, Mr. Scott?"

"You can try, sir. It depends on the frequency barriers."

Spock switched the speaker through to the Bridge. "Open a frequency on these new figures, Lieutenant Uhura, and try to contact the Captain."

"Yes, sir! Hailing frequencies open and ready!"

If Spock had been looking at the Bridge viewer he would have seen the Bridge crew, McCoy among them, indulging in an emotional display of considerable intensity.

Kirk's own feelings were also more than a trifle emotional. It was not merely the oddity of seeing himself in strange uniform on a strange ship. He looked so much older! Unable to watch any more he turned and made his way out of the room. He had to think this out quietly somewhere.

The reception area was now almost deserted except for a small crowd round the bar and the Tribble-girls, as he mentally called them, who were sitting together in a corner. He could have done with a drink, but had no idea what sort of credits were used in this place. A large glass, half full of pale golden liquid, stood on a table near him. There was no-one sitting there and after a moment he made his way over to the table, sat down, and picked up the glass. The drink was very odd but not unpleasant; nor very alcoholic, he noticed with regret. He could really do with a large, very large Saurian brandy. Still, it was better than nothing and he sat quietly sipping the drink, unaware of the speculative stares of the Tribble-girls, who had noticed him.

"I tell you, it is him!" said a blue-clad girl with a very furry golden tribble.

"Rubbish! It can't be. No-one ever mentioned him coming, and he wouldn't come in uniform, anyway!"

"Well, it's his double, then, that's all I can say!"

"If you really think it's him, I dare you to speak to him. Ask for an autograph."

Blue Girl put down her glass, plucked up her courage and her tribble, and started, slightly unsteadily for it had been the fourth glass, across the floor to the solitary figure.

"Excuse me?"

The voice beside him made him look up quickly. "Were you talking to me?"

Good heavens, the voice was surely the right one, too!

"Excuse me, but could I have your autograph, Mr. Shatner?" and a photograph and a pen appeared under his nose.

If a Klingon had suddenly appeared Kirk could not have been more astonished.

"I'm sorry, there's some mistake. My name isn't - Shatner, was it?" He smiled kindly. That was a mistake, too.

Blue Girl turned away with a dazed expression and tottered over to the others.

"Did you see that smile?" she gasped. "I don't care what you say, or

what he says. It's him!"

The other Tribble-girls had seen the smile, though at longer range. They were equally impressed. To Kirk's horror the whole group stood up and moved towards him. He gazed round in desperation, saw a door with a familiar-looking symbol on it, and bolted desperately into the one place where they could not follow him. Once inside he collapsed against a basin to recover himself. At that moment his communicator beeped.

There was no-one else in the room as far as he could see, so he snapped open the communicator quickly. "Kirk to Enterprise."

"Captain, are you all right?"

"Yes, Uhura, I'm fine. Where am I?"

"We do not know that, sir. We hope you can tell us."

That was Scotty. Kirk relaxed. "Can you beam me up?"

"Aye, sir, in a couple of minutes."

"Spock here, Captain. I am pleased to hear your voice. It would be advisable for you to ensure that there is no-one within a radius of three meters of you for the beam-up. We are locked onto your communicator."

"I'm alone at the moment, but if necessary I'll move to an open space. When is the deadline?"

"One point seven minutes, Captain."

Kirk checked his chronometer and stood there impatiently. After only twenty seconds, however, the door opened and several men entered. Confound it! He would have to move, and hope the girls had gone.

Unfortunately, they had not gone far. He edged out of the door into the reception area, which was now crowded again. People were pouring out of the room with the view-screen, and several other doors were also open.

"There he is, look!" Blue Girl's shrill cry attracted much more attention from this bigger crowd, and many people turned round to see who she was talking about.

Kirk suddenly found himself the cynosure of all eyes. Eyes that suddenly widened with recognition. As more and more people began to move in his direction, Kirk looked frantically round. There was an open door a few yards away which seemed to lead into an empty room. He turned quickly and moved towards it, trying to ignore the crowd advancing upon him.

Yes, the room was empty. Or so he thought. With five seconds to go, he bolted through the door and found himself in an open space at the other end of the view-screen room. The lights had come on, and many people were waiting for the next item of the Trekcon but, instead of the fancy-dress parade, a familiar figure in a golden shirt suddenly appeared for a few seconds in full view of the scores of Trekkers; then, before their very eyes, Captain James T. Kirk shimmered out of sight in a blaze of gold.

BLOOD FEVER

Liquid fire flows through my veins.
 Every part of me is consumed
 with burning need.
 My heart is flame, and my mind is filled
 With strange music;
 An ancient, pounding rhythm,
 Older, even, than the stone circle
 In which we stand.
 Incessant, demanding,
 It drives me past the point
 Where logic ends
 And insanity begins.

Across the circle, I see my Captain.
 There is fear in his eyes,
 But also fierce determination, and a trust
 That once I swore I would never betray.

But the pulsing drumbeat of the madness
 Floods my senses,
 Destroying all sense of perception,
 Turning trusted friend into alien Challenger,
 Beloved Captain into hated adversary.

I struggle to resist the illusion
 But the call of the blood will not be denied.
 I feel the flames rise to consume me
 And I know that soon
 I will be lost...

But then
 His eyes meet mine,
 And, for a moment,
 I hear the sound of a different music;
 Its melody stronger, sweeter, more clear
 Even than the call
 Of the ancient madness.

"I will do what I must, T'Pau.
But not with him."

CARINNA

Yes, there it was again. Spock sat upright on his bed. That same cry for help. Concentrating carefully he closed his eyes and followed the sound. The voice was clearer this time, and identifiable as a telepathic message. Cautiously linking with the mind, Spock found himself in the dark hold of a cargo ship.

//Thank you for hearing me,// came the soft voice in his mind.

Spock carefully filtered out the strong claustrophobic impression of imprisonment he was receiving, and turned his attention to the owner of the voice. She was young, but not a child; and although obviously frightened, quite in control of herself.

//The engines are powering up - we don't have long. Although you are strong this ship will soon part us too far for me to broadcast. Oh!// Anguish filled his thoughts. //Please help me...!//

And the voice was gone.

Spock reassembled his thoughts, and opening his eyes punched a button on the side of his communications monitor.

"Miss Uhura, could you check if any passing ships engaged their warp drive approximately 2.44 minutes ago?"

There was a brief pause before the Communications Officer replied. "There has only been one ship in the vicinity with warp drive capacity, Mr. Spock. Sensors indicate the T.S. Ma-rinnha - a Drodani ship - left subspace at the time you suggested, and is heading towards Alpha Mercedin at Warp Factor 2."

Spock gave a brief nod of acknowledgement. "Thank you, Lieutenant," and switched off the console.

On the Bridge Lieutenant-Commander Uhura had the briefest sensation of delight that she had pleased the demanding Vulcan. Whatever else might be said of him, even the slightest flicker of appreciation in his dark penetrating eyes was better than other men could give with a thousand words.

Spock made his way to the next-door cabin. Kirk was alone when he entered, and was pleased to see him. The Captain, who had finished his shift at the same time as his second-in-command, motioned to the Vulcan to sit down.

Kirk regarded his friend very briefly before enquiring gently, "What's the matter, Spock? I can see there's something bothering you."

Spock gazed into the Human's concerned eyes and replied, "I have just received a telepathic message. The message was very brief - I merely gained the impression that the sender was in some distress, and was being held captive in the dark hold of a cargo ship. I lost contact as the ship gained speed and distance. I have checked with the Bridge, and found that the only ship in the immediate vicinity entered hyperspace at precisely that moment. I believe that a young woman is being held captive aboard the T.S. Ma-rinnha, which is heading at Warp Factor 2 towards Alpha Mercedin."

"Ma-rinnha - that's a Drodani ship, isn't it?"

Spock nodded. "Yes, Jim. The Drodani Quintara system has only just been opened to the Federation. It is situated on the border of the Romulan/Federation Neutral Zone."

Kirk sighed. The Drodanii were not the most popular of new races to enter Federation jurisdiction. They had an embarrassing enthusiasm for disagreement and conflict; and even at the best of times the members of the Federation Council did not always see eye to eye to antenna about most subjects. The Drodani Embassy and Ambassadors had shown themselves to be excellent catalysts where an awkward situation could be turned into a diplomatic disaster. All the Captain of the Enterprise needed at that precise moment after the difficult affair on Emna 9 was trouble with the Drodanii.

Nevertheless, no member of the Federation had the right to take captives of any other race, and Spock seemed quite certain that the girl had not been of Drodani ancestry. Not that the Drodanii had any form of telepathic power - a fact borne out by the girl's repeated attempts to summon help not having been blocked.

The girl herself was more of a problem. There were few races with telepathic capabilities either as members of the Federation or known outside. True telepaths were very rare, and there were only a few partially telepathic races, like the Vulcans. That the girl was not a full telepath was obvious; although she could broadcast over large distances to another talent, she had not teleported from danger. No, she was either not a full telepath, or she had not fully developed her talent. That she was strong, however, was indisputable, a fact which greatly concerned the half-Vulcan she had communicated her plight to. Although by no means incapable telepathically, Spock would certainly not have been able to send a message over such a long distance, or over the wide area she would have had to have used. It would have been impossible for her to have located him with only a tight beam transmission.

At that moment the inter-ship communicator buzzed for attention, and on activating the switch control Uhura's face appeared.

"Sorry to disturb you, Captain, but I have a priority call from Commander Martin of Space Station 17 for you."

"Thank you, Lieutenant. Put the call through here, please."

As Commander Martin's face replaced Uhura's on the screen Spock made as if to leave, but the Commander asked for him to be present.

"Captain, Mr. Spock, I have just received several messages mentioning some form of telepathic transmission. All three Vulcans on the Station and the one Human with a high psionic reading have all reported receiving a distress call. Has anyone on your ship experienced a similar occurrence, Jim?"

Kirk and Spock exchanged glances. "Indeed, Commander. Mr. Spock has just reported receiving a distress message from a girl we believe may be aboard the Drodani cargo ship T.S. Ma-rinnha, which left your station a short while ago."

Tor Martin was obviously surprised at the quantity of information Spock had gained through the brief transmission.

"One moment, Captain, Mr. Spock..." The Commander spoke briefly to someone standing outside of the viewer's range. "I have just had it confirmed, Captain," Martin said as he turned to face the viewer once more, "that none of the telepaths on this Station received more than a distress call. Therefore I suggest that the best course of action would be for the Enterprise to set course for Alpha Mercedin immediately. I will inform Starfleet of the information you have given me, and I'll see what I can do about getting you some orders to search the said vessel. You will, of course, be posted later on any additional orders should Starfleet deem it necessary. Oh, and good luck, Jim - Drodanii can be difficult to handle under the most friendly circumstances."

Kirk mused for a moment over what the 'gentle giant', as the tall Swedish Commander had been nicknamed, had said; then, having ascertained the important information that all crew were aboard the Captain had navigator DiFalco set course for the Alpha system before she too went off duty.

Even travelling at Warp 3 it would be some hours before the Enterprise entered Drodani space, and it would be well into Kirk's next duty period before the Ma-rinnha, travelling at Warp 2, arrived. As there would be little point in arriving exhausted at their destination Spock bade his Captain goodnight, and the two met again for breakfast the next morning.

Kirk found Spock in a quiet corner of the rec room sipping coffee and contemplating the previous evening's encounter. Kirk set his tray, with its

simple contents, onto the table and sat down opposite the Vulcan.

"Spock?"

"Yes, Captain?"

"Have you any idea of the girl's race? Extraordinary powers such as hers... they couldn't have gone unrecorded in Federation space."

"Precisely my thoughts, Captain; therefore I undertook a systematic search into psionic powers, including latent examples. From the impressions I received I believe she must be relatively young for her race; yet the fact that I gained no more information about her other than gender, age and her current situation, proves how easily she was able to deflect my thought waves. She has either been trained, or has a strong natural shield. I suspect the former, although the latter cannot be ruled out entirely. However, I have not been able to locate any reference to such a talent in a young girl from the computer's memory banks. Therefore she must either have come from a planet not represented on the Federation Council, or from a planet outside Federation space."

"I don't suppose that you have enough data to have any idea as to which possibility is the most likely?"

"Data - no, Captain. However, I have not previously encountered a mind which was as capable of control despite the situation among humanoids, other than Vulcans and Vulcan-trained telepaths. Had she undergone any form of Vulcan training I would have recognised her methods of control and utilisation of power. Also, of course, any telepath trained on Vulcan or by Vulcan methods is always recorded with Starfleet. If she had been so trained I would undoubtedly have located her in the Computer Library."

Kirk swallowed the last of his coffee. "So?"

"So, Jim, it would seem most logical to assume that she has been brought into Federation space by the Drodanii, from outside. As Drodani space is so close to Romulan territory, and the Neutral Zone has been wavering owing to ion storms, it is quite possible that she has come from a planet on the Romulan side of the Neutral Zone. Of course, the fact that the people of the Romulan Empire and the Vulcans had a common ancestry in prehistory seems to add weight to my supposition."

"Spock, didn't you get any idea from the girl's accent? I know her cry for help was in American English..."

Spock made a negative gesture. "No, there was very little in the way of accent. I didn't get the impression that Terran was her natural language, although she was quite confident in her usage."

"I was afraid of that. Ah well. Spock - would it help if you were not on duty today? You might be able to locate her if she signals again."

"I had thought of that, Captain, but I believe that by being on duty I may be more attuned to listening for her call."

The Vulcan rose, and followed his Captain to the turbo elevator. "It is impossible to initiate any form of search aboard the Enterprise. There are too many Humans with unshielded minds for me to concentrate for long periods."

Kirk realised what he meant when a couple of junior crew members joined them in the elevator. The two orderlies were discussing the merits of a particular brand of perfume. He felt quite relieved when they left the two senior officers in peace a few moments later.

Not that Kirk had anything against perfume - indeed, he had a marked fondness for a pleasant fragrance, particularly when worn by an attractive female; but when on duty as the Captain of the Enterprise the merits of Betelgeusian crammerfluss was not a subject which often crossed his mind. A somewhat fortunate state of affairs for the crew, and particularly for the state of mind of a certain First Officer.

Two floors later the elevator doors opened again to give a magnificent panoramic view of the Bridge with its command chair at the centre. Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock, without a moment's hesitation or even a glance at the wonderful sight, stepped onto the command deck and once more became a part of the scene.

Kirk sank into his chair. "Miss DiFalco, what is our estimated time of arrival in the Quintara Belt?"

"We should arrive in the Belt in twelve minutes, Captain," the navigation officer replied.

The communicator in Kirk's chair attracted his attention in its usual manner. He flicked a switch, indignant that it had made him jump. "Kirk here."

"Jim, can you spare a few minutes - there's something I'd like to discuss with you?"

"Sure, Bones - I'll be right down. Spock, you have the con." And so saying Kirk left the Bridge.

The ship's Medical Section was located several floors below the Bridge, and it was in the Chief Medical Officer's main office that Dr. Leonard McCoy was waiting.

"Well, Bones, what can I do for you?" Kirk took the proffered glass of blue liquid and tried it; Pandoran schwater, third grade. Not bad - certainly not special occasion stuff, more in the way of medicinal help with news which is about to fall somewhat heavily.

McCoy indicated that his friend should sit down. "Jim, do you realise what this month is the anniversary of?"

Kirk looked up from his glass. "This month? No, not especially. Why?"

McCoy sighed. "Where were we seven years ago this month?"

Kirk thought for a moment and then felt sick. "On our way to the inauguration ceremonies we had to make a detour to Vulcan..."

"Precisely. And Jim... it's time Spock entered pon farr again. If his cycle runs true then he should start experiencing... problems... sometime in the next month. He may already be behaving abnormally, but the changes are so subliminal we haven't noticed them yet."

McCoy drained his glass heavily and offered to refill Kirk's. Kirk shook his head; he had been right about the drink's medicinal purposes, and now suddenly found himself unable to stomach further refreshment.

"Jim, have you noticed any unusual behaviour lately?" McCoy refilled his own glass, and then Kirk's as a matter of course.

"I'm not sure if what I've noticed is actually a change in behaviour or just a coincidence. You know Spock received a telepathic message last night after going off duty?"

McCoy nodded. "Yes, you told me when we met for a nightcap before turning in."

"Well, there's nothing unusual in his receiving the message - four others on the space station also intercepted the signal. However, the Starbase telepaths only 'heard' vague distress calls. Although further from the source telepath than the other receivers, Spock managed to link briefly with the girl, and gained quite a bit of information. He was surprised himself that all he found out was the girl's situation, her age, and her gender - no name, race, or anything else. I know Spock put that down to her having been trained to shield her mind. Do you suppose he only picked up the signal in the first place because she is female and he is entering pon farr - a fact which he may not even realise himself yet?"

McCoy watched Kirk with amusement. "Aiming for a job in Vulcan psychiatry now, Jim? Honestly, I don't really know - it's quite possible. Vulcans do select their mates with a certain degree of telepathy. It is the right time, and he was the only receiver to achieve contact. Don't suppose you know if all the other receivers were male? Could be the girl was looking for a member of the opposite sex."

Kirk put down the glass he had unconsciously drained and walked to the door. Before departing he turned and looked at the doctor. "The other receivers were all female," he said with a concerned note in his voice.

McCoy regarded his empty hands with apparent interest. "Then I guess we had better keep a pretty close watch on him, then."

Kirk nodded, and left the doctor with a definite air of despondency about his mood.

Kirk returned to the Bridge and took over command from Spock, whom he watched carefully as he returned to his science console. His concerned gaze was met and returned with a highly arched eyebrow and a slightly haughty look. Well, that at least could be called normal...

Uhura was receiving an incoming signal. "Captain, I'm picking up a signal from a ship on the same course as ourselves, directed to the Drodani sector."

"Thank you, Lieutenant. Spock?"

"Verified, Captain. The ship is the T.S. Ma-rinnha." The Vulcan did not waste time looking up from his viewer to reply.

"Captain, the message ends, 'Mission completed. Scientist found. Further orders awaited'."

Kirk indicated that he wanted Spock to follow him. "Lieutenant, inform me of any message from Starfleet. I'll be in the briefing room. Mr. Scott, take the con."

Once in the main briefing room Spock seated himself at the computer console and directed the computer to provide a diagram of the Drodani Tars class of cargo ship on the viewscreen. He waited until a hologram of the secondary cargo deck appeared and placed the computer on 'hold'.

"Well, Spock, do we have any idea where the girl is most likely to be held?"

The Science Officer indicated the aft section. "The lighting in these areas is at a premium even during loading, Captain. The upper decks contain sparse living quarters, and the lower decks are mainly concerned with the maintenance and engineering departments. The forward compartments of this cargo deck are similar in design and function to those on board the Enterprise. The floor area and cubic capacity are somewhat smaller, but large consignments of bulk cargo are not usually dealt with by this type of ship. The aft section, however, is quite capable of being used to hold hostages or captives. It is made up of a honeycomb of small, cell-like rooms. I received little impression of the size of the room from the brief contact, although the feeling of being trapped was claustrophobic, which suggests that she is, or was, held in a room not awesome in its dimensions. Even without lighting the immense size of the forward section would be imposing, and create a feeling of agoraphobia."

Suddenly the Vulcan closed his eyes and began to concentrate. A few moments later he whispered softly, "I am here, you are welcome. I will assist you if I can."

Kirk could only watch his friend's tense body, and sensed the feeling of useless inadequacy which he always felt watching a telepath achieving a mindmeld. A feeling which was always stronger when the vulnerable half-Vulcan was involved.

A few moments in actual time later, but an age to the worried observer, Spock opened his eyes and focused them on the Captain.

"Her name is Carinna Bordaluke; she is a Paxien. 'There are refugees we must help or there will be a major disaster. The Drodanii are selfish and stupid. I can stop the war.' Then the contact was broken."

If Spock could have shrugged he would have done; instead he turned to the computer and asked for information about the people from the planet Lunaria Paxus, currently within the bounds of the Romulan Empire.

The computer soon informed the two men of the interesting news that, because of the fluctuation of the Neutral Zone owing to ion storm activity, the planet Lunaria Paxus would pass from Romulan territory into the Zone itself.

The Paxiens were not themselves Romulan in ancestry, but since the Empire had conquered the planet some two hundred years previously there had been a degree of hybridisation between the two races, as there had been with other races under the Empire's rule. The main point of interest with regard to Starfleet and the Federation was that there existed a flourishing spy network of Paxiens, many of whom were continually running the gauntlet of the Empire and passing weaponry information to their close neighbours the Drodanii. This relatively easy route of spy information was the one major reason for the Drodanii being accepted into the Federation of Planets, despite the political difficulties they caused.

Although obviously distrusted by their Romulan masters, the Paxiens had proved themselves to be formidable weaponry and scientific experts. Because of their use with regard to developing new equipment and chemicals for warfare the Paxiens were allowed to live and work on their home planet, despite that planet being so close to the Neutral Zone, and despite the dangerous dissenting minority.

The briefing room communications monitor attracted Kirk's attention. He opened the channel. "Yes, Lieutenant?"

"Captain, the message you were expecting from Starfleet has just arrived, priority two."

"Thank you, Uhura. Put the message through to me here."

Uhura's face disappeared and Commander Lurry's replaced it. "Captain, we have reason to believe that the Drodani ship T.S. Ma-rinnha has been trafficking in Genevar white oil, and you are authorised to deal with the matter accordingly. Lurry out."

The screen went blank and a gleeful smile crept across Kirk's lips. "That must be one of the best orders I've ever received."

"Indeed, Captain. An extremely useful order."

"Mr. Spock, would you organise a search team rota with yourself leading the first shift. I'm going to the Bridge to contact the Ma-rinnha's Captain." With that Kirk marched out of the door muttering "Genevar white oil" cheerfully to himself.

Spock informed the first search party then went to prepare himself and to calibrate the tricorders to search for the illegal substance. Genevar white oil was a by-product of the sticky tar acquired from the sap of the Grenan tree, a Genevarn hardwood. The tar was quite useful if refined to a clear jelly which could then be used medically. Unfortunately the refining process also produced the white oily by-product which was one of the best (or worst) hallucinogens known to the Federation. Although not fatal the drug caused serious physical and psychological damage to any carbon-based life form stupid enough to form a dependency on the substance.

Five hundred years previously the Genevarns had discovered that the drug was easily used for neurological warfare, and had slowly eradicated the entire population of a neighbouring planet. Therefore the transportation of the oil from planet to planet was expressly forbidden by the Federation in case such a disaster should happen again. If there was any suspicion that a ship might be carrying the substance then Starfleet had the power to order one of its ships to

make an extremely detailed search of the ship under suspicion. Starfleet was careful to use such a special power only in very rare cases. By giving the Captain of the Enterprise such an order Starfleet had allowed Kirk to take the Drodani ship apart if necessary in his search. Such a search would undoubtedly reveal the presence of a prisoner should one be present. The odds on finding Carinna were much higher than on finding white oil.

Teil Yorg, the Captain of the Ma-rinnha, paced the flight deck of his ship restlessly. He was all too aware that he had a Starship preceding him to his home planet. Yorg paced because he was waiting; although he did not yet know what for. It was up to the Captain of the Enterprise to make the first move, and he would then have to think fast according to the situation.

Whatever happened, he had to make sure that they were not searched. There were one or two Captains in Starfleet, as in the merchant fleets, who could be persuaded by friendly means... He turned to his assistant and asked who was commanding the Enterprise at that time.

Yorg's assistant, Varn, looked up from her computer console. "The Enterprise is currently under the command of Captain J.T. Kirk."

"Fanz!" Yorg swore.

"Captain?" Varn looked up.

Yorg sighed and sat down next to her. "I was hoping for a pliable Captain," he said, "but I would have to get Kirk! It's said he's so perfect his crew worship him, particularly that Vulcan half-breed First Officer of his."

Varn sympathised, but could not change the situation. They were alone on the Bridge. There were only two other crew members, the Ma-rinnha was built for short journeys between neighbouring systems and friendly planets. She was basically unarmed, only carrying weapons for protection against space pirates. For a mere cargo ship the Ma-rinnha could run fast, but at top speed the Enterprise could match her pace for pace - and then some.

Yorg looked into the pretty, calculating face of his second-in-command and decided he had better things to do than worry about the Enterprise and her Captain. Varn couldn't agree more; perhaps there was romance in the air... or was it love?

Kirk looked at the smirking Captain of the Ma-rinnha on the viewscreen, and at his flushed female officer, and decided much the same thing. The subject reminded him of Spock, and he glanced in the Vulcan's direction.

Spock, however, was finishing calibrating the tricorders the search parties were going to use, and appeared to be as normal as ever. It was, of course, a risk Kirk was taking sending Spock with the search party, but he would find Carinna so much quicker telepathically than the other search parties could. McCoy had mumbled something about 'looking for a mate', but Kirk didn't want to risk spending too much time on the Ma-rinnha; he wanted to find out about the refugees and the disaster Spock had mentioned after the last mindmeld.

Captain James T. Kirk of the U.S.S. Enterprise smiled one of his sweetest smiles and informed Captain Yorg of the T.S. Ma-rinnha that his vessel was about to be searched for Genevar white oil. Jim Kirk was delighted to see the smirk being rapidly replaced by a somewhat blanched expression. As soon as Yorg heard the orders Kirk had received from Commander Lurry he knew the game was up. There was nowhere to go, and nowhere to hide. He could not refuse permission for a search for white oil. However certain he was that there was none aboard, he had to let Kirk's men search the ship.

And when they searched the ship they would find that confounded Paxien scientist he was transporting to Drodani Delta, his home planet. The realisation that he had no ground to stand on, legal or illegal, knocked the fight from

Yorg's body and soul. He weakly agreed to let Kirk's search party board, and closed communications channels. Varn made the mistake of touching her Captain's arm in sympathy, and was roughly pushed aside.

Yorg ordered that his crew should accompany all search parties in case the Enterprise men tried to plant white oil aboard. Otherwise he directed that they should not hamper the Starfleet personnel at all; there was no point at that time in aggravating an already disastrous situation.

Varn was detailed to accompany the first boarding party. She was surprised that the Vulcan leading the party not only appeared well advised as to the layout of the ship, but that he headed straight for the aft cargo hold. She was even more surprised when he leaned against a wall and appeared to pass out completely, especially as the rest of the Enterprise party did not seem in the least concerned.

Before many moments had passed the Vulcan opened his eyes, straightened, and led the way down a corridor. Two elevator shafts, three corners and four corridors later they found themselves outside the small metal door to a storage room. Usually used for the storage of fine fabrics, or transporting precious art work, the room had its own basic atmospheric control system, also usable for a life support system. The door was triple locked on the outside.

Varn obediently opened the door, and was surprised to find the Paxien scientist sitting on a packing case. As Assistant Commander, Varn was well aware that Carinna was on the ship, but as the scientist had been moved from location to location, she was surprised to find her behind that particular door.

Carinna rose to greet them, and as she stepped out into the light she revealed herself to be a tall, slender, classically-featured Romulan hybrid. Her movements were as lithe as her face was beautiful.

Spock gallantly offered her his hand as she stepped over the base of the door hatch frame; it was graciously accepted. If only McCoy or Kirk had been present the sight would have given them food for thought; but unfortunately they were not.

They were present later, however, when Vulcan and Romulan stepped from the transporter platform. From their vantage point by the transporter console McCoy murmured appreciatively, "Now that is what I call a stunner! I wish all scientists looked like that!"

Kirk could do no better than agree with him, and both men noted subconsciously what an elegant couple they would make.

Kirk had asked Scott and Chekov to wait for them in the main briefing room. After speaking quickly to Sulu, who was leading the second search party, Kirk led Carinna, Spock and McCoy to the turbolift and then to the briefing room. As they entered Scott and Chekov rose and added their silent appreciation of the young Paxien's appearance.

Carinna sat down in the seat that was held out for her and began to explain the enigmatic message that she had passed to Spock.

"I come from the planet Lunaria Paxus, which, as you are doubtless aware, is currently situated within the borders of the Romulan Empire. However, before long, owing to the fluctuation of the Neutral Zone, the planet will be leaving the Imperial regions and moving within the Zone itself. The Romulan Empire is obviously aware that it will lose all rights and jurisdiction over Lunaria at that time. This is material with which I am sure you are all well acquainted. Lunaria's value to the Empire may not be so immediately obvious, however. During the past six generations Lunaria has housed one of the main weaponry research establishments within the Empire. Needless to say, the Empire has no desire to turn such important equipment over to the Federation scientists. Therefore it has been decided that the planet Lunaria Paxus should be made uninhabitable to all life forms. All the technological hardware is being removed to safer installations nearer the centre of the Empire. Naturally all Paxiens

are being moved also.

However, there is a group of us, mainly scientists like myself, who wish to leave the Empire and join the Federation. To pay our way we have stolen the holograms of a new weapon codenamed 'White-out'. Several of us have been working on the design of this, the Empire's latest weapon."

"Forgive me, but I don't quite understand why you were being held captive by the Drodanii?"

Carinna shuddered. "You must understand, Captain, that the Drodanii are opportunists. They well understood that the knowledge we have could bring them a multitude of benefits and some friends among the Federation's assorted member planets. The Drodanii are not the most likeable of races, and they need all the help they can get to win allies."

Spock gazed at the newcomer over steepled fingers. "How did the Drodanii find out that your people had such information for sale?"

Carinna turned and matched her dark eyes to his. "Some of us have been leaking information to the Federation - we had to have contacts, and the Drodanii were a reasonably useful go-between. The Romulans were aware that they had spies on Paxus; they are doubtless searching for my friends at this moment."

Spock nodded thoughtfully. "The refugees that you mentioned."

She sighed. "Yes, and they are in the greatest danger imaginable. The Romulan forces are looking for them, and their ship is barely spaceworthy. We didn't have much money or time to build ourselves a reasonable escape craft. We had to make do with a patched-up wreck, and hope that it would last long enough to get us across the Neutral Zone and into Federation space."

"And hope like hell that a Federation ship was on the other side waiting for ye," Scott commented, awed at the prospect. There was a pause as everyone took in the significance of what the Paxien freedom fighters were trying to do.

Carinna spoke again into the silence. "The Drodanii kidnapped me in the hope of extracting the information about the 'White-out'. What they do not realise is that I am quite unable to deliver any such information. For our own safety it was imperative that we dissenters kept a close guard on our thoughts. Fortunately, the Romulan blood in many of us has helped us shield our thoughts and minds against intrusion. Between us we hold the key to the weapon, but there is not one of us who knows the entire formula, and none of us can divulge our secrets without the aid of another trained telepath. The Romulans do not use their latent telepathic powers to any useful effect. Their imaginations are fortunately limited to its potential. We Paxiens, however, have no such limits; perhaps this is why we have been highly valued in the Empire despite the danger of dissenters and spies.

Captain, I would urge you to make the rescue of the Gynarre and her crew your top priority. I know we are only illegal immigrants requiring political asylum, but the knowledge we have could avert a major disaster. You must agree with me, Captain, that a war between the Klingon/Romulan alliance and the Federation would be inevitable with this new weapon. Not just thirty lives are at stake, but millions."

Carinna closed her eyes and bowed her head; when she spoke again her voice was barely audible, directed as it was to the table top. "Captain, I'm sorry, but I can do no more; I will have to rest before I can be of any further use to you. Is there somewhere I can have some peace and quiet, and meditate undisturbed?"

Kirk nodded, and was about to suggest one of the spare quarters could be made available for her use when Spock said softly,

"If you would like to rest in my quarters while a room is being prepared for you and decorated to your taste?"

Carinna smiled wearily. "Thank you, Mr. Spock, your kind offer is well

received. I should be honoured to be allowed to use your quarters temporarily."

Spock did not notice McCoy's raised eyebrows as he led their guest from the room. Kirk did notice, however, and frowned at McCoy, who looked sheepish.

"Well, Captain, what do we do now with yon Drodanii?" Scott asked. "If the lassie was telling the truth then we are duty bound to look for the refugees."

"Yes, Jim, I agree with Scotty; but how do we know she was telling the truth?" McCoy looked as though he were about to say more, but stopped himself in time.

Kirk shrugged. "I guess the answer is simply that we don't - and we just don't have the time to get in touch with Starfleet and get a directive on the matter. Of course, Spock seems fairly certain of her honesty."

McCoy looked doubtful. "But even he admits that her mind is well shielded."

"Uh-oh!" Kirk closed his eyes and listened.

//Captain?// the voice came again.

//Spock?//

McCoy motioned to Scott and Chekov to be quiet as Kirk concentrated.

//Indeed, Captain,// another voice echoed, shadowy and illusive in his mind. //Yes, I, Carinna, am here too. Mr. Spock// her tone was deferential //wanted you to see the 'White-out'; he thought that there was information that might be valuable to you.//

As her voice faded a picture emerged and filled the sight of Kirk's inner eye. A white resin, fluorescent Syrian glow water, sparking rocks and a pitch-black canister leaking a sickly pink powder. The black canister was evil, its dark forbidding shape was central in his thoughts. Hatred was there too - but hatred of what? Hatred of the Federation? No, that was not it. Hatred of the Romulans? No, it was not that simple. An all-embracing loathing filled him, twisting his body before the worried onlookers.

Suddenly Kirk's eyes opened and the contact was lost. That was it - the hatred was for what the canister symbolised and was capable of. Those few innocuous-looking ingredients could cause a horrific chain reaction of events. Simple at first, causing basic atomic connections to be made. But the end results were nightmareish in the extreme, for the toxin produced could bond any material to any other, chemically. The reaction was quite simple, just allow the chemicals to mix in the correct proportions (such as by dropping the canister, which would break on impact) and the elements would bond together and alter the atomic arrangement of anything the substance came into contact with.

Like a key building its own locks. Thus all material, whether animate or inanimate, was reduced to two compounds - atoms which 'locked' and waste atoms which became the fuel for the reaction. The hatred Kirk had felt was that experienced by the discoverer of the volatile mixture. The 'White-out' did not merely look for locks to fit, but restructured the material to fit itself. Should the substance be used on a planet, then the entire surface of the planet would turn to a shiny mica-like substance. This white covering (which could easily be many kilometers in depth) was the only known substance to resist the attack of the reaction. The only other means of stopping the reaction was by destruction through extreme heat, such as that within a planet's core. The mica-like substance was quite harmless to life, and it was theoretically possible that eventually life could return to a decimated planet.

Kirk felt a hand on his shoulder and realised that McCoy was about to give him a sedative.

"No, Bones! Not yet!" His tone was urgent.

The briefing room door slid open and Spock raced in. "Jim, I felt you break contact - are you all right?"

Kirk smiled weakly. "Yes." He took a deep breath. "I'll be all right in a minute. That sure is a nasty weapon to have around. What I don't understand is - why should that information be so immediately necessary for me?"

Spock looked deep into the Human's eyes. "That white resin is a concentrated form of Genevar white oil; and Carinna had a small supply of crystallised resin with her when she was captured. If Mr. Sulu investigates hold number three, he should find reason enough for the arrest of the Ma-rinnha's crew. Then, with a Security team on board, and enough technical staff in the boarding crew, it should be possible to have the Ma-rinnha taken under arrest to Space Station 17 while the Enterprise goes on to the Neutral Zone to watch for the refugees."

Kirk had to agree. "As usual, you seem to be right, Mr. Spock." He flicked a switch. "Lieutenant, is Mr. Sulu still aboard the Ma-rinnha?"

Uhura nodded. "Yes, Captain, he reported back only moments ago - the search is continuing."

"Lieutenant, I want a line opened to Mr. Sulu, please."

While Uhura was setting up the link Kirk batted away something that buzzed too near, only to discover that it was McCoy's medi-scanner. "Well, Doctor?"

"You're okay, but I just wanted to make sure after the initial shock died down. That must have been some nightmare you saw just then."

"It was, Bones, it was. Chekov, put together a fresh boarding party to consist of two Security guards and three flight technicians to replace the present party. Then, when the white oil is found I want you to arrest the Ma-rinnha's crew and transport them back here and hold them under close arrest. Spock, I want you to brief the boarding party supplied by Mr. Chekov - have them return the Ma-rinnha to Space Station 17." Kirk turned back to the viewscreen.

"I have Mr. Sulu for you, Captain."

"Thank you, Uhura. Sulu?"

"Yes, Captain?"

"Sulu, are you anywhere near searching hold number three yet?"

"We are just about to, Captain."

"Somewhere in that hold you should find some containers of crystalline white oil. When you find the containers I want you to beam back with them, bringing your team back with you. I'll have a replacement team standing by."

Sulu spoke to one of his assistants. "Captain, do we know how large the containers are likely to be?"

Kirk looked at Spock, who replied, "You should find three silver-coloured tubes approximately 2.4cm in diameter and 9.5cm in length. The tubes are held in a black leathercloth pouch in one of the top compartments of Miss Bordaluke's grey bag."

There was a few moments pause before Sulu spoke again. "We've got them, Captain."

Captain Kirk resumed his place on the Bridge and sat down in his command chair. The Drodanii crew were in the brig, and the Ma-rinnha was well on her way back to the Space Station. Scotty was nursing his 'bairns' in the Engineering Section, and McCoy was waited to receive the refugees - if they were found - down in Sickbay.

Carinna was standing next to Security Chief Chekov, who was endeavouring not to appear self-conscious in his work with the fair lady looking over his left arm.

Spock turned his seat through 90° so that he was sideways on to the Captain. Kirk turned to look at him.

"Are we within scanning range of the Neutral Zone yet, Mr. Spock?"

Spock glanced briefly at the main viewscreen. "The Neutral Zone will be within scanning range in 10.4 minutes, Captain." Without turning his chair back the Vulcan again began studying the viewer on his science station console.

"Lieutenant Uhura, begin scanning for transmissions of any kind from the Romulan side of the Neutral Zone. Miss DiFalco, you have suggested that this is the most likely area for the refugees to try to break through; as soon as they come into sensor range I want to be where they are going to leave the Neutral Zone. Miss Bordaluke, is there any way you can contact your friends, to give us some idea where to look for them?"

Carinna shook her head sadly. "No, Captain. They will be in visual range of your sensors before they are in my range as a telepath."

"Captain, we are now within sensor range of the Neutral Zone, and I am picking up readings of a Romulan battleship heading in this direction."

"Thank you, Mr. Spock. Mr. Sulu, put a picture of the Neutral Zone up on the screen, full magnification."

"Yes, Captain."

The viewscreen flickered into life to show a minute Romulan bird of prey : " stalking what looked little more than a sparrow in comparison. The small craft shook violently as a beam of destruction left the Romulan vessel and hit the Gynarre broadside.

Sulu looked up from his computer panel. "Her broadside deflector has weakened, Captain - she's not going to take much more punishment."

Carinna sighed and moved to the Captain's chair. She closed her eyes and began to concentrate.

"Captain, there are only ten people on board! Telloch says the others were caught before they managed to effect an escape. He says the Gynarre is beginning to show signs that she is going to break up. He does not believe that they will make it to Federation space. As soon as they enter the Neutral Zone the Romulans have orders to destroy them." She grasped Kirk's arm tightly in her distress. "Captain, the deflector shield has buckled... Oh!" The Paxien wilted gracefully to the floor, where she remained for some time before opening her eyes.

"The Gynarre's number two shield has collapsed, Captain; the Romulan ship is closing for the kill." Spock's even voice did nothing to dispell the heightening of tension building among the Bridge crew.

"They broke contact with me, Captain," Carinna said softly. "They said goodbye."

Kirk barely heard her. "Miss Uhura, open a channel to the Romulan ship pursuing the Gynarre. Miss DiFalco, set course for where the refugees will enter the Neutral Zone."

"Course laid in, sir," the navigator replied.

"Mr. Sulu, I want us to stay just this side of the Zone. Mr. Chekov, let me know the instant we are in transporter range of the refugees' ship."

Through the automatic chorus of "Aye, sir," that accompanied his list of orders, Kirk flipped open the communication chanel to the Engineering Control room. "Mr. Scott?"

"Aye, Captain, Scott here."

"Mr. Scott, I want you to go to the main transporter room and help Chief Rand with what may prove some delicate transporting."

"Captain, I have the Romulan Commander for you."

"Thank you, Uhura. Commander, I want you to know that as soon as that ship

you are pursuing enters the Neutral Zone I will assume the status of a mercy mission and aid her crew in any way I can. Kirk out."

Kirk turned to Uhura and made a cutting motion with his hand. She broke the communications link with the Romulan vessel as he did so.

"Captain, the Gynarre will enter the Neutral Zone in 7.6 minutes, but there has just been a direct hit to the weakened third shield. Shield number three has just collapsed. We are now in transporter range."

Spock turned to look at the Captain, who reacted instantly. "Scotty, Rand - get them on board, quick!"

There was an agonising wait before Scott said, "We have ten guests, sir."

Kirk motioned to Spock and McCoy to sit down. McCoy began pouring a liberal helping of Silurian Brandy for himself and Kirk. Spock had declined the offer, feeling that he had no need to pollute his system with a liquid that had no effect on him other than basic refreshment.

Kirk stretched leisurely in his chair, pleased at the thought of a job well done. He took a sip from the drink McCoy handed him and decided that Silurian Brandy could certainly be called 'special occasion stuff'. Kirk raised his glass.

"To a mission completed," he said.

"Indeed, Captain," Spock commented. "The Federation were well pleased with the information gleaned from the refugees."

Kirk nodded. "And it looks as though, after a thorough de-briefing, the Paxien refugees are going to be accepted as members of the Federation. I've heard it suggested that Vulcan is asking that they should become Fellows of the Vulcan Science Academy."

"Personally," said McCoy, draining his glass and pouring himself another, "the thing I like best about the whole affair is that the Drodanii are going to be put back on probation with a view to their rejoining the Federation when they've 'grown up'. By the way, Jim, what would Starfleet have done if there hadn't been any white oil on board?"

"That," Kirk replied, "was the clever part about the order - Starfleet took a gamble that Carinna would carry some samples with her. They were already aware of the 'White-out' weapon, and although they didn't know the details they knew enough to risk upsetting the Drodanii. Of course, with both the Federation and the Klingon/Romulan alliance having the formula for 'White-out', neither side has any advantage in using it, which somewhat lessens its use as a weapon."

"Then that just leaves one question unanswered," commented McCoy, as both he and Kirk turned to look at Spock.

The Vulcan regarded them with an air of innocence. "As you both seem to have decided that I can explain the unanswered question that you mentioned, I suggest that it might save time if you tell me what the question is." He looked from one man to the other.

Kirk shrugged and indicated McCoy. "It's your subject, Bones - fire away."

McCoy coughed and looked embarrassed. "It's just that seven years ago..."

"Yes, Doctor?"

"Seven years ago we were on our way to the inauguration ceremonies when we had to stop at Vulcan..." The doctor looked at Kirk for help. Kirk smiled at him, which was no help whatsoever.

"What I believe you are attempting to say, if I understand the complex way in which you have asked a perfectly simple question, is 'Why am I not suffering from the effects of pon farr.' The answer is equally simple. Not long after the experience to which you refer, I realised that the emotional shock I suffered

had temporarily brought my Human half into dominance. When I returned to Vulcan after the completion of the last five-year mission, I underwent a thorough medical examination. The result of the computer prediction I obtained was that as my Human half had taken control briefly the Vulcan urge for pon farr had been temporarily subjugated. Until such time as I decide to take a wife, the chances are that I will not be troubled by pon farr again."

McCoy refilled Kirk's glass and his own, and poured one for the Vulcan. "Let's drink to that," he said.

A VULCAN WALKS COMPANIONLESS

A man with no companion is lost
And wanders lonely paths uncomforted,
Unaided by those men who call him friend.
To outlive your Lord is sad indeed,
For when your Captain dies
What hope is left for you?
What is left for the loyal friend,
When there is no-one else
To fill the aching void he leaves?
Your soul is frozen hard and dry
By the unfeeling, icy winds of sorrow.
The world is featureless and grey.

Farewell, t'hy'la, brother!
Your soul has fled
Through outer darkness and frozen wastes.
This time I cannot follow thee.
My friend, I see you yet,
In all the places we once walked together,
And every memory is a stabbing pain
Hidden behind an impassive mask of uncaring.
Now only I can see
The half-smile and the hazel eyes
That saw within me... once.

Farewell from he who walks companionless
To he who once became a friend.
